

# Victor Jara

A Latin American Tragedy



A Story by  
Lina de Guevara

# **The world still grieves the loss of a great artist, poet, and tender soul.**

It is an honour to participate in the telling of this vital story.

## **Film Access:**

<https://vimeo.com/590377214>

## **Lina de Guevara**

Theatre Director and Storyteller

## **Dr. Robin J Hood**

Co-producer & Researcher

## **Kim Nicole Holl**

Filmmaker, Editor & Co-producer

[Life Through the Lens](#)

[www.StoriesToldonFilm.ca](http://www.StoriesToldonFilm.ca)

## **Special Recognition**

Victor Jara's biography was adapted and translated from Gabriel Sepulveda's book, *Victor Jara, Hombre de Teatro*.

# The Timing of this Story

December 2021

As a former student of Victor Jara, the news of his death in September 1973 shocked Lina deeply, as it did most Chileans. At the time no one could imagine the cruelty and horror that the military would unleash. This was not the culture Chileans knew. Nor could they understand the reason for Victor's assassination. It was a dangerous time to speak out or to question.

One day, decades later, Lina's daughter, Valentina had a serendipitous encounter with a man in Nimes, France. As fate would have it, this man from Nimes was the one person who could provide answers to Victor's final days and brutal assassination. Their paths had crossed for a reason and for Lina, it was a sign that the time had come to share this vital story.

With Victor's murder, the world lost a unique Chilean artist, poet, humanist, social activist, and tender soul. It is her hope that this short film will encourage dialogue and deep inquiry. It is an invitation to pause and reflect on what pushes people to the tipping point where extreme violence against humanity is possible. It is time to explore ways in which we can prevent this from ever happening again, anywhere. We must have the courage to question and not look away.



# About Victor Jara

Chilean teacher, theatre director, poet, singer-songwriter, and social activist.

Victor Jara Martinez was born September 28, 1932 in Quinquen, a small town in Southern Chile. The family included another brother and two sisters. His parents were peasants, who provided for their family working hard in the fields of wealthy landowners. It was a demanding life, and the whole family, even the smaller children had to participate in all the necessary tasks during long days! They lived in isolation, far away from the big cities, where life was said to be easier. But the isolation had advantages, and one of them became very important for Victor as a child. Music was their only form of entertainment and along with playing traditional songs, they created their own music and played to celebrate religious feasts, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and special occasions. Victor's mother, Amanda, was always in demand for her beautiful voice, and her deep knowledge of melodies appropriate for every occasion. So, Victor learnt music easily, and it became a natural and essential part of his life.

Various circumstances forced the family to move to Santiago, the capital of Chile. Life there was hard. They lived in a poor neighborhood and longed for the countryside. However, this move gave them the chance to go to school, and Amanda, took good care to turn them into serious students. Living in a big city, in miserable conditions, awakened Victor's social conscience. He never forgot how hard, and unfair life was for the poor in Chile.

Unfortunately, Amanda died from a heart attack when Victor was 17 years old. The family separated, and Victor had to find a way of coping. His brothers and sisters each followed their own paths. Victor tried different ways of making a living. He was usually well appreciated but the work itself did not interest him. He saw an ad in the paper calling for volunteers to participate in a choir at the University of Chile. He was accepted as a tenor and asked to sing in the monk's choir in "Carmina Burana"!

## Victor Jara, continued

This was an unforgettable experience that opened the world of art for Victor. His interest, his talents, his total commitment to the demands of art, drew the attention of other artists, and doors began to open for him. He was given a scholarship to attend the Theatre School of the University of Chile. Once there he continued to study and cultivate his talents in music and in Theatre. He was an exceptional student, who was also friendly, and easygoing. The Theatre School had excellent teachers, committed to giving the best instruction possible and opening doors for their students. They believed that Theatre was an art that should have an important social impact and lead to a better world for all.

Over the years Victor continued to develop as a theatre actor, director, and teacher. He also became well known in Chile as a wonderful composer and singer. His fame reached other Latin American countries, and even the United States, thanks to a tour organized by the University of Chile's National Theatre Institute which presented one of Victor's plays with his music. His personal life now included his wife, dancer Joan Turner and their two daughters.

Then the political situation in Chile changed, and the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet was established. At that time, Victor was teaching Folk Music in Technical State University. On September 11, 1973, he was detained in the University building together with more than a hundred teachers, students, and university personnel. All of them were taken to the Santiago Stadium, and most were shot. Victor, a great artist, and human being was one of the victims.

Lina de Guevara

Adapted and translated from Gabriel Sepulveda's book, Victor Jara, Hombre de Teatro.

# Lina de Guevara



Born in Chile, Lina de Guevara is an actor, director, theatre instructor, and storyteller. She's a specialist in the techniques of Transformational theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, and Commedia dell'Arte. She has lived in Victoria BC, Canada, since 1976.

In 1988 she founded PUENTE Theatre and was its artistic director until her retirement in 2011. PUENTE created and produced numerous plays about the immigrant experience and about diversity.

Lina has participated as keynote speaker, panelist, workshop leader, and director in many national and international Festivals, such as Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro and Toronto, Festival de Pastorelas in Mexico City, Women in View Festival in Vancouver, Popular Theatre Festivals in Guelph and Edmonton, the IDEA Conference in Ottawa, PRISMATIC In Halifax, IMPACT Conference in Kitchener/Waterloo, Arts4All and African Stages Storytelling Symposium in Vancouver and National Storytellers Conference in Victoria 2009.

Lina studied theatre in the Theatre School of the University of Chile, and Victor Jara was one of her teachers. She remembers him as a dedicated, intelligent teacher who deeply loved his art, and inspired his students to work in-depth, with love and respect for their craft. He also encouraged his students to explore, as Chilean artists, their own reality and search their own history, culture, and society for artistic inspiration.

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For PUENTE Theatre Lina wrote and directed over 30 plays, highlights are:

- Familia
- CanadianTango
- I wasn't born here
- Crossing Borders
- Story Mosaic
- Sisters/Strangers
- Storytelling Our Lives
- Journey to Mapu

Lina directed plays by other Latin American authors:

- Pastorela de Juan Tierra
- Canadian Tango 09
- Letters for Tomas
- The woman who fell from the sky
- The Pilgrimage of the Nuns of Concepción
- Puppets & Traditions

# How to Use this Film

*We cannot find solutions to issues  
that sleep in the shadows.*

Let this short film become a portal, and an invitation to enter into deep meaningful conversations, exploring the human condition, and an understanding of our collective potential for violence and our capacity to care so that the atrocities that happened during the Pinochet regime in 1973 will no longer be repeated anywhere.

## Preparing for Deep Inquiry

### **Process Overview:**

1. Share Lina's reason for sharing the film
2. Share Victor's story
3. Show the film
4. Silence 5 – 10 minutes allowing time for integration and to record thoughts, feelings, and emerging questions.
5. Community Conversation – move to small groups of 6 - 8 for a round table discussion. One person at each table record highlights.
6. Large group sharing – Gather the most significant highlights from each table.

# Preparing for Deep Inquiry - What to expect

## **Viewing the Film** (20:35 minutes)

We begin with the short film about Victor Jara as told by Lina de Guevara. The film is an invitation to step into a new space, to examine the paradigms we hold, to widen our lens, open our hearts, and create a safe space to inquire together.

## **Silence** (5 – 10 minutes)

Let Lina's story and the lyrics at the end of the film transport you. Fall into silence and be still with your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Take pen to paper and begin to record what emerges, including any questions that might arise.

## **Small-Group Conversations** (45:00 minutes)

Using the Conversation Cafe Model (see next page), enter into small group conversations using the sample questions that follow to guide dialogue, or come up with your own.

## **Large-Group Debrief** (20:00 minutes)

Share the highlights from each small-group discussion and debrief allowing new questions and insights to emerge.

# Using the Conversation Cafe Model

by Kim Holl

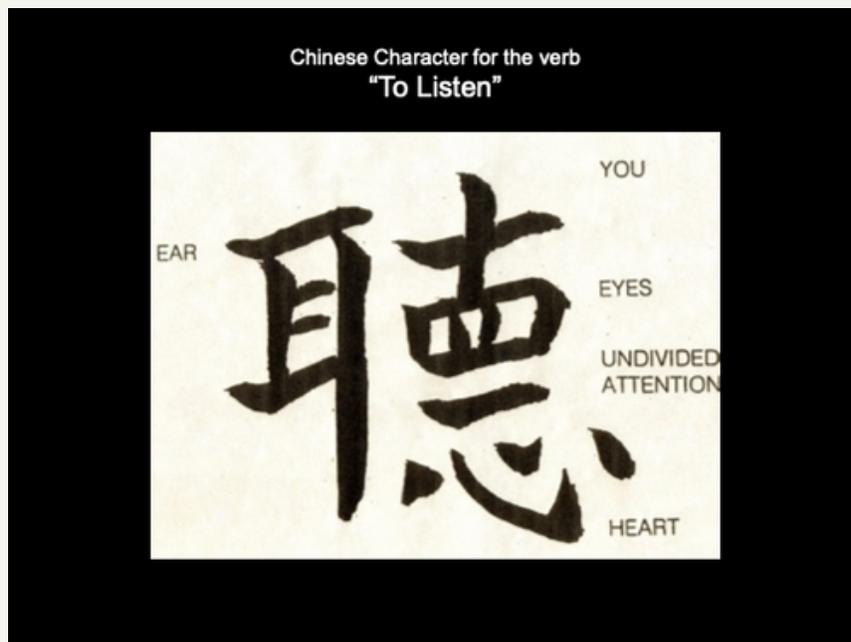
While most of us are very good at talking....and sometimes only take a break when we are sleeping, others do more listening than talking. Have you ever noticed within circles, there are always the same few people doing most of the talking? The others may nod their head in agreement, or offer a few words before they are quickly overcome by the louder voices. It does not mean that their ideas are not as buoyant or creative. Have you noticed that often the most insightful answers come from those who spend most of their lives in quiet observation and reflection. If we don't create an invitation for all voices to be heard, we miss out on the full collective wisdom.

The Conversation model we are using is based on the Conversation Café model started by Vicki Robin – environmentalist, educator, author of *Your Money or Your Life*. She believed that modern culture is suffering from social isolation. Her remedy was to bring diverse groups of people together in public places to talk about issues that matter. To move from small talk, to big talk.

It was on the back burner for several years until 911 happened and then everyone had a need to talk. Vicki launched the first Conversation Café in Seattle. I attended my first one on Bainbridge Island, WA in 2003. I sat at a small round table for 8, with ages ranging from 18 to 92 years old. The evening was transformative. It wasn't the topic but the experience. I was hooked and began using the Conversation Café Model in my work as a facilitator with one small change.

The focus for Conversation Café was the act of participating in dialogue. My interest was engaging in social activism and pondering What does it take to move from talk to action. With permission, I adapted the Agreements and have since facilitated 100's of conversations in the USA and Canada for youth and social service providers on issues that impact their communities. It has become a powerful recipe for social change.

The reason for the success of these conversations is illustrated by the Chinese symbol for "To Listen". It is wise beyond the art. The left side of the symbol represents an ear. The right side represents the individual - you. The eyes and undivided attention are next and finally, there is the heart. The symbol tells us that to listen we must use both ears, watch and maintain eye contact, give undivided attention, and finally be empathetic. In other words, we must engage in active listening!



# Begin Your Conversations

**Move into small groups** of 6 – 8 for round table discussions. At the centre of each table, place the questions so that participants can review. You can select a few of the questions posed or come up with your own. Have one person at each table volunteer to record the conversation highlights.

## Agreements

By entering into the conversations, you are agreeing to:

- **Open-mindedness:** listen to and respect all points of view
- **Acceptance:** suspend judgement as best you can
- **Curiosity:** seek to understand rather than persuade
- **Discovery:** question old assumptions, look for new insights
- **Sincerity:** speak for yourself - what has personal heart and meaning
- **Brevity:** go for honesty and depth but don't go on and on.

# Conversation Process

## **Round 1: INTRODUCTION:**

Pass around the speaking object; each person speaks directly to the topic, no feedback or response (1 min each)

## **Round 2: GOING DEEPER**

Again with talking object, each person deepens their own comments or speaks to what has meaning now. (1 min each)

## **Round 3: FREE FLOW**

With the speaking object now in the center of the table, it is free for anyone to pick up the speaking object and share. Open and spirited conversation flows. (20 – 40 min total)

## **Round 4: FINDING MEANING, TAKING ACTION**

With the talking object, each person shares briefly what was meaningful to them and what they might be willing to commit to as a result of their conversation. (1 min each)

# Large-group Debrief

Invite each small group to share the significant highlights from their conversations. It is a chance to explore even deeper, address new questions, and highlight possibilities. Each conversation is an opportunity to walk into our own wisdom. If useful record the responses.

# Protential Questions

- Does this story resonate with you in some way?
- Is there anything in this story that you feel is relevant to your life?
- Does the story remind you of anything you have heard or experienced?
- Why do you think Victor was targeted and received such extreme punishment?
- How did it feel to learn of Valentina's encounter in France?
- How did you feel when you learned about the man from Nimes, France, who as a young man, risked his life to tell Joan Jara of her husband's death? Would you have done the same?
- What are some of the reasons governments act in this way?
- What was accomplished by Victor's death?
- Do you think we should continue to tell this story? Why?
- Have you heard similar stories? Please share the ones you know.
- Do you have other questions or comments you'd like to explore?



As long as we sing his songs,  
As long as his courage can inspire us  
to greater courage  
Victor Jara will never die.

- Unknown