



**Slug:** Amontonados

**Título:** Refugiados

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**Web Description:** Stella Forner will never forget her first wedding anniversary. It was March of 1976 and she spent the day at the Mexican consulate in Montevideo, Uruguay, which was in the midst of a military dictatorship. She, her husband and their baby weren't there for a romantic celebration but to ask for political asylum. They had no idea how long it would be until they again felt at home in their own country.

**INTRO:**

**HOST 01:**

**In February of 1976, life was tense for Stella Forner.**

[MUSIC]

**She had just given birth to her first son, Guillermo.**

**TRACK 01:**

Cuando Guillermo nació, el país estaba muy dividido. Eran tiempos violentos.

**HOST 02:**

**Especialmente en Uruguay, donde era cada vez más difícil disentir con el gobierno, apoyar sindicatos, o ser miembro de un partido político disidente.**

**TRACK 02:**

Yo era todas esas cosas.

**HOST 03:**

**Pero por muy difíciles que fueran las cosas, estaban por llegar cosas mucho peores.**

[MUSIC]

**TRACK 03:**

Un día, yo estaba en mi casa cuando alguien tocó la puerta. Era un amigo del partido comunista, del que yo era parte.

**HOST 04:**

**Sí, Stella era militante del partido comunista en Uruguay.**

TRACK 04:

Dijo que debíamos escapar. Nos buscaban los militares.

**HOST 05:**

**They said they were coming to get her. She immediately started packing.**

TRACK 05:

Guardé algunas cosas en un bolso. Mi esposo, mi bebé y yo salimos de nuestra casa en solo unos minutos y nunca regresamos. Entramos a la clandestinidad.

**HOST 06:**

**Entraron a la clandestinidad. They went into hiding.**

[MUSIC]

**HOST 07:**

**Welcome to the Duolingo Spanish Podcast — I'm your host, Martina Castro, and each episode we bring you fascinating first-person stories from Spanish speakers across the world. The storytellers will be using intermediate Spanish and I will be chiming in for context, in English. But these are not language lessons, they're real life lessons through language.**

[FADE MUSIC]

**GUIÓN:**

**HOST 08:**

**Stella Forner was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1954. She grew up in a leftist household, where it was common to talk about politics, the Russian revolution and the plight of the working class.**

[SFX protests]

TRACK 06:

En los años 60, en Uruguay había muchos conflictos políticos. Todo estaba cambiando, y a mí me comenzó a interesar la política.

Eran tiempos violentos – muchos comunistas fueron torturados. Algunos amigos fueron a prisión.

No podía aceptar esa injusticia. Entonces, cuando tenía 14 años, decidí unirme al partido comunista.

**HOST 09:**

**As a member of the communist party, Stella went to rallies in support of union activists. The government had started to clamp down on political opposition and to cede control to the military.**

TRACK 07:

Poco tiempo después, vi a dos compañeros del partido comunista morir, asesinados por los militares.

**HOST 10:**

**This changed the stakes for Stella... Prison and death: they were just around the corner if she wasn't careful.**

**HOST 11:**

**On June 27, 1973, the uruguayan military dissolved the parliament and officially took hold of leadership in Uruguay.**

[MUSIC]

**They immediately took measures to suppress political parties and activities, especially those from the left. The unions reacted by calling for a general strike and the occupation of factories and universities.**

[SFX Bombs]

TRACK 08:

Me casé en marzo de 1975. Un año después, tuve a Guillermo, mi primer hijo. En ese momento, vivir en Uruguay siendo comunista no era fácil.

**HOST 12:**

**About a month after her son's birth, Stella heard some disturbing news.**

TRACK 09:

Alguien nos cantó y tuvimos que escapar.

**HOST 13:**

**Cantar -- the word literally means to sing, but at this time in Uruguay, to say that someone "te cantó" meant that they had snitched on you. It was a term commonly used to describe when political prisoners gave up the names of their colleagues, often after being tortured. That's when Stella knew she had to leave her house and go into hiding. They became political refugees, or refugiados.**

[END MUSIC]

TRACK 10:

Los primeros meses viviendo como refugiados fueron muy difíciles. No podíamos ir a la casa de mis papás o familia, porque allí el gobierno nos podría encontrar.

**HOST 14:**

**So instead Stella, her husband, and her baby would stay in different places each night.**

TRACK 11:

Yo bañaba a Guillermo donde podía. Las cosas de todos los días eran ahora un problema para nosotros. Pero teníamos esperanza.

**HOST 15:**

**They didn't think the dictatorship would last that long, maybe a few months tops. So they continued hiding, changing homes every few days to make sure the military never caught up with them. Until one day, Stella turned on the TV and saw her husband's face.**

**TRACK 12:**

Todos los días, la televisión publicaba fotos y nombres de personas buscadas por los militares. Un día, mi esposo apareció en esa lista y también en el periódico.

[SFX tv off]

[MUSIC]

**HOST 16:**

**He was listed among the fugitives the military was hunting down. It was too risky to continue living in hiding. They needed asylum.**

**Stella had heard the Mexican Ambassador was willing to take in political prisoners. So on March 19, 1976, on her first wedding anniversary, Stella and her family went to the Mexican consulate.**

**TRACK 13:**

Fuimos al consulado de México en ómnibus. Mi papá vino con nosotros. Estaba tenso y triste, pero intentó actuar lo más natural posible.

**HOST 17:**

**When they entered the consulate, they had to justify their need for asylum. Stella showed them her husband's name in the paper and they immediately let them in.**

**TRACK 14:**

Esa noche, dormimos en el consulado. Al día siguiente, fuimos a la casa del embajador.

[END MUSIC]

**HOST 18:**

**During that time, the embajador or ambassador and the consulate of Mexico gave refuge to hundreds of Uruguayan political activists. The Mexican president had opened up its embassies in Argentina and Chile as well.**

TRACK 15:

El presidente de México, en ese momento, era Luis Echeverría Álvarez. Quería ser candidato para Secretario de las Naciones Unidas (UN).

**HOST 19:**

**He wanted to be el Secretario de Las Naciones Unidas, or the Secretary of the “United Nations”.**

TRACK 16:

Por eso, él ayudaba a los refugiados.

[SFX family group sounds in the background]

**HOST 20:**

**In a short time, up to 120 people had arrived to live in the Mexican ambassador’s residence, along with Stella and her family. Stella remembers the house well.**

TRACK 17:

La casa era muy grande, con dos pisos. Había una sala, una biblioteca, una cocina, muchos baños, y otras áreas grandes como el sótano...

**HOST 21:**

**The basement...**

TRACK 18:

Y un ático...

**HOST 22:**  
**An attic...**

TRACK 19:  
En estos lugares dormíamos. Todo era enorme.

**HOST 23:**  
**All of these rooms were gradually converted into dorm rooms.**

TRACK 20:  
La casa era muy grande y confortable, pero muy pequeña para 120 personas.

**HOST 24:**  
**At first, there was a steady flow of airplanes out of Uruguay carrying the exiles who had managed to secure special visas to get asylum in Mexico. But then the Uruguayan government decided to stop issuing the visas.**

TRACK 21:  
Declararon que los refugiados eran delincuentes y que no debían obtener asilo político.

[MUSIC]

**HOST 25:**  
**The mexican ambassador, Vicente Muñiz Arroyo, played a key role here because he refused to kick the exiles out of the embassy. This began a waiting game for the exiles, one that was made more difficult given the disparity in their situations.**

TRACK 22:  
Había mujeres solas con sus hijos o embarazadas, sus esposos en prisión o desaparecidos.

**HOST 26:**

**“Desaparecidos” were people who had disappeared or gone missing. Nobody knew if they were alive or dead but people believed they had been killed by the military. There are still close to 200 “desaparecidos” in Uruguay from that time.**

[END MUSIC]

[SFX family sounds]

**TRACK 23:**

En la casa había niños chiquitos y grandes, también bebés. Muchos hombres tenían a sus familias fuera de la residencia del embajador. Cada refugiado vivía experiencias muy diferentes.

**HOST 27:**

**At that moment the exiles started organizing committees, which they called “comisiones”. Each committee had a specific task, like cleaning the house, taking care of the small children, or resolving conflicts that came up in daily life.**

**TRACK 24:**

Teníamos turnos para las comidas. Primero los bebés, después los niños, y finalmente los adultos. También había comisiones para organizar juegos y actividades para los niños.

Yo aprendí a ser mamá en esa casa. Nunca pensé que la primera comida de mi hijo iba a ser en un lugar así, y sin la ayuda de mi familia, de mis hermanas, de mis amigos. Aprendí a ser mamá en un mundo extraño.

**HOST 28:**

**Stella remembers one of the doctor’s sons being rather jealous of Guillermo, her son, because he had both of his parents with him in the embassy. When Guillermo would sleep, the kid would wake him up by hitting him with a pillow.**

TRACK 25:

Yo tenía que estar con Guillermo todo el tiempo, porque no quería conflictos con otros niños.

**HOST 29:**

**These kinds of issues were common with the children. If the kids weren't in their room, they had to be in someone's arms, which really exhausted the mothers.**

[SFX brooming and cleaning]

[SFX kids running]

TRACK 26:

Teníamos que limpiar la casa todos los días. Los niños corrían por toda la casa y las paredes quedaban negras.

120 personas, con niños de 6, 7 años, dentro de una casa por meses. Era imposible.

[MUSIC]

**HOST 30:**

**Stella held onto the hope that the dictatorship would dissolve soon and everyone could go back home. But on June 28, 1976, the situation for the exiles in the Mexican embassy took a turn for the worse.**

*[ARCHIVAL AUDIO] Se trata de una desaparición...*

**HOST 31:**

**On that day, Elena Quinteros, a local teacher, jumped over the wall of the embassy of Venezuela.**

TRACK 27:

Ella gritó su nombre y pidió asilo político. Pero militares uruguayos entraron a la embajada y la tomaron a la fuerza.

**HOST 32:**

**That was the last time she was ever seen. The incident led to the breaking of diplomatic relations between Venezuela and Uruguay.**

TRACK 28:

El caso de Elena Quinteros marcó un antes y un después para todos los refugiados. Por primera vez sentimos que la embajada mexicana no era un lugar seguro, que no teníamos protección. Los militares podían entrar en cualquier momento.

[END MUSIC]

**HOST 33:**

**The situation at the embassy only got more tense as the exiles retreated further from the public eye.**

TRACK 29:

Los militares nos observaban las 24 horas del día. Todos estábamos nerviosos. Todos teníamos miedo. Los niños estaban adentro, en la casa, todo el día. No salíamos al patio. No sentimos la luz del sol en nuestras caras por mucho tiempo.

**HOST 34:**

**Stella's son had gone so long without feeling the sun, that he was later diagnosed with rickets due to his low levels of vitamin D.**

TRACK 30:

En la casa no teníamos asistencia médica. No teníamos medicina, ni kit de emergencia.

TRACK 31:

No teníamos comida o necesidades básicas suficientes para tantas personas. Hacíamos comidas muy simples y Vicente, el embajador, comía con nosotros.

[MUSIC]

**HOST 35:**

**Through the whole process, Ambassador Vicente Muñiz Arroyo was very supportive of the refugees. Some days, he even gave up his own bed so it was available for those who didn't have anywhere else to sleep.**

TRACK 32:

Vicente era una persona excepcional. Él hizo mucho por nosotros en esos tiempos. Muchos refugiados llamaron a sus hijos "Vicente" en su honor.

[END MUSIC]

**HOST 36:**

**In July of 1976, it had been four months since Stella and her family entered the mexican ambassador's home. When suddenly they got word that the Ambassador's diplomatic work to secure their visas had been successful. Something Stella had never considered likely was happening -- they were leaving Uruguay.**

TRACK 33:

Sentíamos muchas emociones. Estábamos felices por salir de la casa del embajador. Pero estábamos tristes por dejar Uruguay.

[Music or sfx]

**HOST 37:**

**And yet, before she and her family could feel safe, they would have to leave the walls of the ambassador's residence, and make it onto that airplane.**

**HOST 38:**

**Stella remembers the day they walked out of the ambassador's house.**

**TRACK 34:**

Fue terrible. Yo tenía mucho miedo. Era un día muy frío y llovía.

[SFX Cars]

**HOST 39:**

**They cautiously got into a car, which was surrounded by the Uruguayan military. They were escorted to the airport by a motorcade of military vehicles, international human rights organizations, and members of the Mexican Embassy.**

**TRACK 35:**

Cuando llegamos al aeropuerto, yo estaba nerviosa. Había muchos soldados uruguayos con armas y no paraban de mirarnos.

**HOST 40:**

**Stella made it onto the plane with her family. The Mexican ambassador and his staff were close behind them. They didn't leave Stella's side until right before the door of the plane closed behind them.**

[SFX Airplane]

**As the plane took off, she waved to her father who had accompanied them to the airport....she wondered to herself --**

TRACK 36:

¿Cuándo voy a regresar a Uruguay? Estaba saliendo de mi país y no sabía si iba a regresar.

[MUSIC]

**HOST 41:**

**Even though she wasn't sure if she'd ever return, she decided to look forward. Stella and her family ended up in Toluca, Mexico.**

TRACK 37:

En México me sentía sola. Tuve dos hijos más, un niño, Martín y una niña, Lucía, lejos de mis papás, lejos de mis amigos y familia. Además, mi relación con mi esposo no iba bien.

**HOST 42:**

**She raised her kids with romantic stories about the marvelous Uruguay they had left behind, a country she still hoped they'd see soon. Months turned into years.**

[END MUSIC]

TRACK 38:

En 1985, finalmente, las cosas en Uruguay cambiaron. El gobierno nos permitió/dejó regresar.

**HOST 43:**

**In 1985 the dictatorship ended and democracy was restored in Uruguay. It had been nine years since Stella left.**

TRACK 39:

Regresé a Uruguay el 9 de enero del año 1985. Probablemente el día más feliz de mi vida. Fue mágico.

Cuando llegué a Montevideo, no podía parar de sonreír.

**HOST 44:**

**Stella remembers being struck by the crowds of people who were at the airport, waving uruguayan flags. She remembers thinking, someone important must be coming today because look at all these people!**

[SFX Applause]

**But they were there for her and for the hundreds of exiles returning to Uruguay since democracy had been restored. It was a historic event.**

TRACK 40:

Los refugiados veníamos de México, pero también de Cuba, Venezuela, Francia y Suecia. Mi familia y mis amigos también estaban allí.

[MUSIC]

**HOST 45:**

**When she saw her father, Stella was surprised to see his head full of white hair. He seemed shorter. He had aged so much since she last saw him.**

TRACK 41:

Cuando lo abracé, mi papá lloró – era la primera vez que lo veía llorar. Estaba feliz y triste al mismo tiempo. En ese momento entendí cuánto había sufrido todos esos años que estuvimos lejos.

**HOST 46:**

**Images of their last goodbyes rushed to Stella's mind. At the time, she had no idea she was leaving not only her father but also her country for the next decade.**

TRACK 42:

Pero poder abrazar a mi padre, volver a casa y a un Uruguay libre y democrático...al final eso es lo que importa.

[MUSIC]

OUTRO:

HOST 47:

**Stella Forner now lives in Uruguay and works as a copy editor at city hall in Montevideo. This story was produced by Florencia Flores Iborra, a uruguayan podcast producer based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.**

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**I'm Martina Castro, gracias por escuchar.**

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