

closed. In the end we got the caretaker to accept the bike, and went off to pay for part of the trip with the sweat of our brows.

Our job as removalists had different stages: the first, particularly interesting, consisted of consuming two kilos of grapes each in record time, assisted by the absence of the house owners; the second, their arrival and the heavy work which followed; the third, Alberto's discovery that the truck driver's colleague had an overactive ego, especially with regard to his body — the poor guy won all the bets we made with him by carrying more furniture than both us and the owner combined (the latter played the fool with barbaric ease).

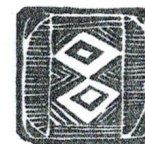
We'd managed to track down our consul who finally turned up at what served as an office, stone-faced (fair enough considering it was a Sunday), and he let us sleep on the patio. After a caustic diatribe regarding our duties as citizens, etc., he topped off his generosity by offering us 200 *pesos* which we, taking righteous offense, refused. If he'd offered it three months later, it would've been a different story. What a save!

Santiago has more or less the same feel as Córdoba. Though its daily pace is much faster and its traffic considerably heavier, its buildings, the nature of its streets, its weather and even the faces of its people, reminded us of our own Mediterranean city. We couldn't get to know the city well because we were there only a few days and were pressed for time with the many things we had to sort out before embarking once again.

The Peruvian consul refused to issue us visas without a letter from his Argentine counterpart, which the latter refused to give, saying the bike probably wouldn't get us there and we'd end up asking the embassy for help (the little angel was ignorant of the fact that the bike was already finished), but he finally relented and they gave us the visas for Peru, at a fee of 400 Chilean *pesos*, a lot of cash for us. In those days the Suquía water polo team from Córdoba was visiting Santiago. Many of the guys were friends of ours, so we paid them a courtesy call while they were playing a match and

got ourselves invited to one of those Chilean-style meals that go something like: "have some ham, try some cheese, drink a little more wine," and that you stand up from — if you can — straining all the thorax muscles in your body. The following day we climbed up Santa Lucía, a rocky formation in the center of the city with its own particular history, and were peacefully performing the task of photographing the city when a convoy of Suquía members arrived, led by some good lookers from the host club. The poor guys were embarrassed enough — unsure of whether to introduce us to these "distinguished ladies of Chilean society," as in the end they did, or play dumb and pretend not to know us (remember our unorthodox attire). But they managed the tight spot as skilfully as possible and were very friendly — as friendly as people could be from worlds as different as theirs and ours at that particular moment in our lives.

The big day arrived at last and two tears ploughed symbolically down Alberto's cheeks. With one last goodbye to La Poderosa, left behind in the garage, we began our journey to Valparaíso. We set off along a magnificent mountain road, the most beautiful civilization could offer compared to the real natural wonders (undamaged by human hands, that is), in a truck bearing the heavy weight of us freeloaders.



## LA SONRISA DE LA GIOCONDA la gioconda's smile

We had come to a new phase in our adventure. We were used to calling idle attention to ourselves with our strange dress and the