Ernesto Che Guevara

I Embrace You With All My Revolutionary Fervor

Letters 1947–1967

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I Embrace You With All My Revolutionary Fervor

Ernesto Che Guevara was born into a middle-class family in Argentina in 1928 and trained as a doctor, but became radicalised by the poverty and hunger he witnessed in South America. He played a key role in the Cuban revolution and served in Fidel Castro's government. He then travelled to Congo to support the rebellion there, and finally to Bolivia where with a small, committed group he initiated a revolutionary movement, and was captured and executed by Bolivian and US military forces in 1967.

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Letters 1947–1967

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Contents

Reading My Father's Letters *by Aleida Guevara* xiii
Ernesto Che Guevara: Biographical Note 1
Chronology of Che Guevara's Life 3
Introduction by the editors 11

LETTERS FROM YOUTH (1947–1956)
Introduction 15
To Father (from Villa María), January 21, 1947 17
To Father (from Villa María), [late] 1947 18
To AMERIMEX (from Buenos Aires), February 28, 1950 19
To Mother (San Martín de los Andes), January 1952 20
To Aunt Beatriz (from Iquitos, Peru), June 1, 1952 22
To Father (from Iquitos), June 4, 1952 24
To Mother (from Bogotá), July 6, 1952 27
To Father (from La Paz), July 24, 1953 32
To Mother (from Cuzco), August 22, 1953 34
To Tita Infante (from Lima), September 3, 1953 36
To Mother (from Guayaquil), October 21, 1953 39
To Aunt Beatriz (from San José de Costa Rica), December 10, 1953 41
To Mother (from Guatemala), December 28, 1953 42
To Father (from Guatemala), January 15, 1954 45
To Aunt Beatriz (from Guatemala), February 12, 1954 47
To Tita Infante (from Guatemala), March 1954 49

Copyrighted Material

To Mother (from Guatemala), [late] April 1954 53
To Zoraida Boluarte (from Guatemala), [no date] 56
To Mother (from Guatemala), April 1954 58
To Mother (from Guatemala), June 20, 1954 60
To Mother (from Guatemala), July 4, 1954 62
To Tita Infante (from Mexico), September 29, 1954 65
To Zoraida Boluarte (from Mexico), October 22, 1954 67
To Mother (from Mexico), November 1954 69
To Tita Infante (from Mexico), November 29, 1954 72
To Mother (from Mexico), [late] 1954 74
To Father (from Mexico), [February or March], 1955 76
To Aunt Beatriz (from Mexico), April 9, 1955 79
To Tita Infante (from Mexico), April 10, 1955 81
To Mother (from Mexico), May 9, 1955 83
To Zoraida Boluarte (from Mexico), May 16, 1955 85
To Father (from Mexico), May 27, 1955 87
To Mother (from Mexico), June 17, 1955 89
To Mother (from Mexico), July 20, 1955 92
To Mother (from Mexico), September 24, 1955 96
To Tita Infante (from Mexico), September 24, 1955 99
To Zoraida Boluarte (from Mexico), October 8, 1955 101
To Mother (from Mexico), [February] 25, 1956 103
To Tita Infante (from Mexico), March 1, 1956 105
To Mother (from Mexico), April 13, 1956 107

Copyrighted Material

To my parents (from Mexico), July 6, 1956 109
To Mother (from Mexico), [July] 15, 1956 112
To Mother (from Mexico), [August or September], 1956 115
To Mother (from Mexico), [October 1956] 117
To Mother (from Mexico), [November 15,1956] 120
To Tita Infante (from Mexico), [November 1956] 122

LETTERS FROM THE GUERRILLA WAR IN CUBA (1956–1959)
Introduction 127

Part One: Letters from the Sierra Maestra
To Daniel, October 1, 1957 129
To the Civic Institutions of Buey Arriba, October 12, 1957 132
To Mario, November 23, [1957] 135
To Daniel, [December] 1957 137
To Darío and Daniel, December 4, 1957 143
To Darío, December 30, 1957 146
To Daniel, December 30, 1957 149
To Calixto, July 13, 1958 153

Part Two: Letters from the Camagüey plains and Las Villas province
To Fidel Castro, September 8, 1958 155
To Fidel Castro, September 13, 1958 157
To Gómez [Raúl Castro], October 23, 1958 159
To Fidel Castro, October 23, 1958 161
To Fidel Castro, November 3, 1958 172
To the Provincial Leaders of the July 26 Movement in Las Villas, December 3, 1958 178

Copyrighted Material

LETTERS AS A LEADER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT (1959–1965)

Introduction 183

To Trapito [Víctor Trapote], January 12, 1959 185

To Juan Hehong Quintana, February 5, 1959 186

To Remberto Martínez Jiménez, February 5, 1959 187

To José E. Martí Leyva, February 5, 1959 188

To William Morris, February 5, 1959 189

To Pedro Revuelta, February 5, 1959 190

To Luis Paredes López, February 5, 1959 191

To Carlos Franqui, March 10, 1959 192

To Dr. Miguel Ángel Quevedo, May 23, 1959 194

To Valentina González Bravo, May 25, 1959 196

To Loreto Cabrera Cruz, May 27, 1959 197

To Pedro Revuelta, May 27, 1959 198

To María Teresa Díaz Dicon, June 1, 1959 199

To José Ricardo Gómez, June 7, 1959 200

To Aleida March, June 22, 1959 201

To Aleida March, June 27, 1959 204

To Aleida March (from India), June 30, 1959 205

To Aleida March, July 12, 1959 207

To Aleida March, [no date] 209

To Aleida March, [no date] 210

To Aleida March, August 6, 1959 211

To Company of International Airports S.A., November 30, 1959 212

To Miguel Grau Triana, March 18, 1960 213

To Ernesto Sábato, April 12, 1960 214

To José Tiquet, May 17, 1960 220

To José R. Silva, July 5, 1960 221

Copyrighted Material

To Mr. Lorenzo Alujas, August 9, 1960 222
To the General Administration of the Bank of China, October 15, 1960 223
To Gustavo Jiménez, December 30, 1960 225
To Fernando Barral, February 15, 1961 226
To Robert Starkie, June 12, 1961 228
To Rolando Díaz Aztaraín, June 27, 1962 229
To Laura Bergquist, October 15, 1962 230
To Anna Louise Strong, November 19, 1962 231
To Antonio Venturelli, November 19, 1962 233
To Carlos Franqui, December 24, 1962 234
To Nicolás Guillén, February 28, 1963 237
To Editorial Grijalbo, S.A., April 1, 1963 238
To Guillermo Lorentzen, May 4, 1963 239
To Peter Marucci, May 4, 1963 240
To Aleida Coto Martínez, May 23, 1963 241
To the Compañeros of the Motorcycle Assembly Plant, May 31, 1963 242
To Lisandro Otero, June 23, 1963 244
To Daniel Gispert, September 2, 1963 245
To José Matar, September 19, 1963 246
To Manuel Navarro Luna, October 18, 1963 247
To Arturo Don Varona, October 28, 1963 248
To Pablo Díaz González, October 28, 1963 249
To Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, October 28, 1963 250
To Lydia Ares Rodríguez, October 30, 1963 251
To Lisandro Otero, November 10, 1963 252
To Juan Ángel Cardi, November 11, 1963 253
To Oscar L. Torras de la Luz, January 3, 1964 255
To Regino G. Boti, February 2, 1964 256

Copyrighted Material

To Charles Bettelheim, February 6, 1964 258
To Josefina Cabrera, February 11, 1964 259
To María Rosario Guevara, February 20, 1964 260
To Luis Amado Blanco, February 25, 1964 261
To José Medero Mestre, February 26, 1964 262
To Luis Corvea, March 14, 1964 264
To Eduardo B. Ordaz, May 26, 1964 266
To Leo Huberman y Paul M. Sweezy, June 12, 1964 267
To Ezequiel Vieta, June 16, 1964 268
To Fabio Vargas Vivanco, June 16, 1964 269
To Regino G. Boti, June 17, 1964 270
To the Cuban Trading Company of Works of Art and Culture, June 25, 1964 272
To Hubert Jacob, June 30, 1964 273
To Santiago Morciego y Manuel Hernández, July 3, 1964 274
To León Felipe, August 21, 1964 275
To Elías Entralgo, August 31, 1964 276
To Juana Rosa Jiménez, September 11, 1964 277
To Julio González Noriega, September 15, 1964 278
To Pedro Pérez Vega, September 23, 1964 280
To Manuel Moreno Fraginals, October 6, 1964 281
To Charles Bettelheim, October 24, 1964 282
To Fidel Castro, March 26, 1965 283

LETTERS FROM AFAR: The Congo and Bolivia (1965–1967)
Introduction 319
To Aleida March, [no date] 321
To my children, [no date] 322

Copyrighted Material

To my parents, [no date] 323
To Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, 1965 325
To Fidel Castro, April 1, 1965 326
To Fidel Castro (from the Congo), October 5, 1965 329
To Armando Hart, December 4, 1965 335
To Aleida March (from the Congo) [no date] 339
To Hilda Beatriz Guevara Gadea, February 15, 1966 340
To Haydée Santamaría, [1966] 342
To Aleida March (from Bolivia), December 1966 344
To my children (from Bolivia), 1966 345

APPENDICES: Letters written to Che Guevara
From Juan Almeida to Che (Sierra Maestra) December 20, 1957 347
From Celia Sánchez to Che (Sierra Maestra) December 13, 1957 349
From Armando Hart to Che (Sierra Maestra) December 25, 1957 351
From Camilo Cienfuegos to Che, April 24, 1958 354
From Fidel Castro, "To the Rebels of Las Villas," (Sierra Maestra) October 2, 1958 355
From Lidia Doce to Che, [no date] 357
From Raúl Roa to Che, (Havana) December 19, 1963 359

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Reading my father's letters

Aleida Guevara[1]

This book is a real gem in the collaborative publishing project between the Che Guevara Studies Center (Havana) and Ocean Press and Ocean Sur. As a selection of his letters, it reveals the intimate side of the man my father was. We often might not know a person very well, but when we read their letters we learn who they really are. And this is what makes this book very special for me because they are letters from different periods of his life and show the development of a real person, the evolution of a human being.

In preparing a speech, Che would carefully weigh his words and plan what he was going to say. He was usually quite animated when giving a speech, clearly presenting his thoughts. In his letters to family and friends, however, he reveals himself candidly, spontaneously. So reading my father's letters is a fascinating way to really get to know him. The Cuban writer Miguel Barnet recently commented what a shame it is that we no longer write letters. And it's true. All you receive these days is an e-mail or a message on your cell phone. Hand-written letters are a lost art, which is a pity because, as you read this book, you can witness how a young person changes over time.

The initial selection of letters are from his youth, when Ernesto leaves Argentina for the first time. In a letter to his mother, whom he playfully calls *Vieja* or Old Lady, he writes:

1 Excerpts from Aleida Guevara's remarks at the Havana launch of the Spanish edition of this book in 2019.

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> I am certain of two things: first is that if I reach my truly creative phase at about 35, my exclusive, or at least main, concern will be nuclear physics, or genetics, or some other field that brings together the most interesting aspects of knowledge. The second is that the Americas will be the theater of my adventures in a way that is much more significant than I could have imagined. I think I have really come to understand it and I feel [Latin] American, which means having a character distinct from all other peoples on the earth. Naturally, I'll visit the rest of the world.

Starting out as a carefree traveler and ambitious scientific researcher, he writes to his mother that his worldview is becoming much "sharper" after witnessing first hand the 1954 US-backed overthrow of the democratically elected government of Guatemala:

> The way that the gringos treat Latin America (remember that the gringos are Yankees) was making me feel increasingly indignant, but at the same time I studied the reasons for their actions and found a scientific explanation. Then came Guatemala and everything that is difficult to describe.

On the birth of his first child, Hilda, in February 1956, he writes addressing his mother as *Abuelita* [Granny]:

> Both of us are a bit older, or if you consider yourself a fruit, a bit more mature. The baby is rather ugly, but you only have to look at her to realize that she is different from all other children of her age. Although she cries when she is hungry, pees herself frequently, light bothers her and she sleeps most of the time, there is something that immediately differentiates her from every other baby: her papa is called Ernesto Guevara.

That's my father!

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Another of the most interesting letters in this book is one Che wrote as a leader of the revolutionary government to the director of the Cuban magazine *Bohemia* in May 1959, responding to personal criticisms made against him as a foreigner and outsider in Cuba:

> It is not my intention to defend myself against the fallacious imputations and the insidious reference to my Argentine citizenship. I am Argentine and I shall never renounce my country of origin (if you will excuse my audacity in the comparison, neither did [Cuban independence hero] Máximo Gómez renounce his Dominican homeland). But I feel Cuban, independently of whether the laws certify it or not: as a Cuban, I shared the sacrifices of the people throughout the armed struggle and today I share their hopes of bringing them to fruition.[2]

There are many letters here that I am sure the reader will enjoy, including some sent to my mother during his travels abroad representing the Cuban revolutionary government, such as this one written only weeks after my parents were married in 1959:

> They decorated me with the Order of the Republic [in Egypt]. A very big medal that looks great on me, and not just because I say so. I went to the silver market to buy you a bracelet but I didn't see anything resembling what I wanted for you, although I am bringing you a few other little things. So far the trip has gone very fast; we haven't had much of a chance to see anything, and it was the same in the UAR [United Arab Republic]. I'm sleeping very little and my eyelids are starting to stick together.

The following day the Cuban delegation visited Gaza and they were horrified at the conditions endured by the Palestinians living there.

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2 Ernesto Che Guevara was granted Cuban citizenship on February 9, 1959.

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> I went to visit the Brazilian officials who are looking after those areas. I established new diplomatic norms of confraternity between peoples by falling asleep on the shoulder of the Egyptian official who was accompanying me.

He wrote some other delightful letters to my mother. I love this little fragment:

> I can't write much because time is short. I only want to tell you that I bought you a beautiful kimono that has a special enchantment for me because of the enchanting geisha who modeled it.

You see, my mother is the jealous type.

There is a special letter written to Ernesto Sábato, an Argentine writer, in which Che explains the process of the Cuban revolution and how he saw Fidel's role. Che describes Fidel as steadfast, always on the frontline and someone who was always honest about what he was going to do. The United States government, Che comments to his fellow Argentine, had its own expectations of Latin American political leaders and Fidel's honesty confused them. To them, what the Cuban government said about the agrarian reform, for example, meant that it would not carry out the agrarian reform if they gave Cuba sufficient money. So when the revolutionary government did what it said it would do, the US government genuinely believed the Cubans had lied. It could never understand that the revolutionary leaders were being truthful.

My father's sense of humor is evident in many letters, such as the one written to Dr. Eduardo Ordaz, who was responsible for publishing 6,300 copies of a journal on psychiatry in Cuba. Che writes he is on "the verge of neuro-economic psychosis" because he thinks that 3,000 too many copies have been printed, given that there were only about 3,000 doctors in Cuba at the time:

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> Are the rats using the magazine to deepen their knowledge of psychiatry or to fill their stomachs? Or perhaps every patient gets a copy of the publication?

Che applauds the quality of the magazine but remarks, "the number of copies is intolerable. Believe me, because crazy people always tell the truth."

Che's previously unpublished letter to Fidel of March 26, 1965, is one of the most important in the book. It is a truly fascinating analysis of the situation in Cuba. He shares his thoughts about errors in the approach to political economy, the budgetary finance system, the internal functioning of the newly formed Communist Party and a range of other issues. He outlines his views about the importance of political consciousness in the challenge of creating a new society, explaining that the new human being will emerge in the process of transforming Cuba's economy.

The book ends with several letters of farewell, which I cannot read without crying. When I was about to turn six, he wrote to us, his children, from Bolivia.

> I write to you from far away and in great haste, which means I can't tell you about my latest adventures. It's a pity, because they've been very interesting [….]
>
> Right now I want to tell you that I love you all very much and I think about you all the time, along with mama, although I really only know the littlest ones through photos, as you were very tiny when I left. I'm going to get a photo taken soon so that you can see what I look like these days — a little older and uglier.

My father instructs me, as the oldest child, to "study hard and help [my] mother in every way [I] can." He reminds Camilo not to swear at school and learn "what is appropriate." His youngest

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child, Ernesto, he hopes will grow up and, as a man, be ready to fight imperialism. And if imperialism has already been defeated, he promises to take him and Camilo on a vacation to the moon.

I was annoyed when I read this letter as a child. Why wasn't I going to the moon with my brothers, while my sister Celia and I were advised to be good little girls and help out at home? Later I came to forgive him when I saw that he had so many photographs of me in his office. I realized that, although he would never take me to the moon, he always carried me in his heart.

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Ernesto Che Guevara: Biographical note

One of *Time* magazine's "icons of the century," Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was born in Rosario, Argentina, on June 14, 1928. He made several trips around Latin America during and immediately after his studies at medical school in Buenos Aires, including his 1952 journey with Alberto Granado, on the unreliable Norton motorcycle described in his early journal, *The Motorcycle Diaries*.

He became involved in political activity while living in Guatemala in 1954, before the elected government of Jacobo Árbenz was overthrown in a CIA-organized military operation. Ernesto escaped to Mexico, profoundly radicalized.

Following up on a contact made in Guatemala, Guevara sought out the group of exiled Cuban revolutionaries in Mexico City. In July 1955, he met Fidel Castro and immediately enlisted in the guerrilla expedition to overthrow Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. The Cubans nicknamed him "Che," a popular form of address in Argentina.

On November 25, 1956, Guevara set sail for Cuba aboard the cabin cruiser *Granma* as the doctor to the guerrilla group that began the revolutionary armed struggle in Cuba's Sierra Maestra mountains. Within several months, he was appointed by Fidel Castro as the first Rebel Army commander, although he continued ministering medically to wounded guerrilla fighters and captured soldiers from Batista's army.

In September 1958, Guevara played a decisive role in the military defeat of Batista after he and Camilo Cienfuegos led separate guerrilla columns westward from the Sierra Maestra to the center of the island.

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After Batista fled on January 1, 1959, Guevara became a key leader of the new revolutionary government, first as head of the Department of Industrialization of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), and then as president of the National Bank. In February 1961, he was appointed minister of industry. He was also a central leader of the political organization that in 1965 became the Cuban Communist Party.

Apart from these responsibilities, Guevara represented the Cuban revolutionary government around the world, heading numerous delegations and speaking at the United Nations and other international forums in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the socialist bloc countries. He earned a reputation as a passionate and articulate spokesperson for Third World peoples, most famously at the 1961 conference at Punta del Este in Uruguay, where he denounced US President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

As had been his stated intention since joining the Cuban revolutionary movement, Guevara left Cuba in April 1965, first to lead a Cuban-organized guerrilla mission to support the revolutionary struggle in the Congo, Africa. He returned to Cuba secretly in December 1965, to prepare another Cuban-organized guerrilla force for Bolivia. Arriving in Bolivia in November 1966, Guevara's plan was to challenge that country's military dictatorship and eventually to instigate a revolutionary movement that would extend throughout the continent of Latin America. The journal he kept during the Bolivian campaign became known as *The Bolivian Diary*. Che was wounded and captured by US-trained and run Bolivian counterinsurgency troops on October 8, 1967. The following day he was murdered in cold blood and his body hidden.

Che Guevara's remains were finally discovered in 1997 and returned to Cuba. A memorial was built at Santa Clara in central Cuba, where he had won a major military battle during the war against the Batista dictatorship.

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Chronology

June 14, 1928 Ernesto Guevara is born in Rosario, Argentina, to parents Ernesto Guevara Lynch and Celia de la Serna; he will be the eldest of five children (Roberto, Celia, Ana María and Juan Martín).

January 1, 1950 Young Ernesto sets out on a 4,000-kilometer trip on a motorized bicycle through the northern provinces of Argentina.

January–July 1952 He travels around Latin America with his friend Alberto Granado, starting out on a vintage Norton motorcycle.

March 10, 1952 General Fulgencio Batista carries out a coup d'état in Cuba.

July 6, 1953 After graduating as a doctor on June 12, Ernesto sets off again to travel through Latin America. He visits Bolivia, observing the aftermath of the 1952 revolution.

July 26, 1953 Fidel Castro leads an unsuccessful armed attack on the Moncada army garrison in Santiago de Cuba, launching the revolutionary struggle to overthrow the Batista regime.

December 1953 Ernesto meets a group of Cuban survivors of the Moncada attack in San José, Costa Rica. He travels on to Guatemala, where the land reform program of the popularly elected government of Jacobo Árbenz is challenging the control of the United Fruit Company.

September 21, 1954 Ernesto flees Guatemala, after a CIA-backed military coup topples President Árbenz and brutally

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suppresses his supporters. In Mexico City, he gets a job at the Central Hospital.

July 1955 Ernesto Guevara meets Fidel Castro soon after the latter arrives in Mexico City following his release from prison. Now nicknamed "Che" (an Argentine term of greeting) by his Cuban friends, he immediately agrees to join the planned guerrilla expedition back to Cuba.

August 18, 1955 Che marries Peruvian revolutionary Hilda Gadea in Mexico. Their daughter Hildita is born the following year.

June 24, 1956 Che is arrested as part of a roundup by Mexican police of exiled Cuban revolutionaries.

November 25, 1956 Eighty-two combatants, including Che Guevara as troop doctor, sail for Cuba from Tuxpan, Mexico, aboard the small cabin cruiser *Granma*.

December 2, 1956 The *Granma* reaches Cuba at Las Coloradas beach in the eastern province of Oriente, but the rebels are surprised by Batista's troops at Alegría de Pío and dispersed. A small group successfully reunites and moves deeper into the Sierra Maestra mountains and begins to recruit local peasants. Within a month they are able to score a significant victory over Batista's forces.

July 21, 1957 Having stood out among the guerrilla combatants in recent battles, Che is selected to lead the newly established second column of the Rebel Army and is promoted to the rank of commander.

July 11–21, 1958 The rebels inflict a decisive defeat on Batista's army and are able to significantly expand their operational zone in the Sierra Maestra.

August 31, 1958 Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos lead "invasion" columns west from the Sierra Maestra mountains toward central Cuba, opening new battle fronts in Las Villas province.

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December 28, 1958 Che Guevara's guerrilla column initiates the battle of Santa Clara and succeeds in taking control of that city within a few days.

January 1, 1959 Batista flees Cuba. Fidel enters Santiago de Cuba in the east of the island as the military regime collapses. Rebel Army columns led by Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos reach Havana the next day.

February 9, 1959 Che Guevara is declared a Cuban citizen.

June 2, 1959 Che marries Aleida March, who had been an urban underground activist and guerrilla fighter during the revolutionary war.

June 12–September 8, 1959 Che Guevara travels through Europe, Africa, and Asia; he signs various commercial, technical, and cultural agreements on behalf of the revolutionary government.

October 7, 1959 Che Guevara is designated head of the Department of Industrialization of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA).

November 26, 1959 Che Guevara is appointed president of the National Bank of Cuba.

March 5, 1960 At the funeral for the victims of a terrorist bombing of the French ship *La Coubre* in Havana's harbor, Cuban photographer Alberto Korda snaps his famous photograph of Che Guevara.

March 17, 1960 President Eisenhower approves a CIA plan to overthrow the revolutionary government and to train a Cuban exile army to invade Cuba.

October 23–December 23, 1960 Che Guevara makes an extended visit to the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Czechoslovakia, China, and North Korea.

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November 24, 1960 Aleida March gives birth to her and Che's first child, Aleidita ("Aliucha").

January 3, 1961 Washington breaks diplomatic relations with Havana.

February 23, 1961 The revolutionary government establishes the Ministry of Industry and Che Guevara is appointed minister.

April 15, 1961 As a prelude to the planned invasion by US-organized forces, planes attack Santiago de Cuba and Havana. The following day, at a mass rally, Fidel Castro proclaims the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution.

April 17–19, 1961 One thousand five hundred Cuban-born and other mercenaries, organized and backed by the United States, invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs but are defeated within 72 hours. Che Guevara is sent to command troops in Pinar del Río province in the west.

August 8, 1961 As head of Cuba's delegation, Che Guevara condemns US President Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress" in a fiery speech to the Organization of American States (OAS) Economic and Social Conference in Punta del Este, Uruguay. Cuba is subsequently expelled from the OAS.

February 3, 1962 President Kennedy orders a total trade embargo against Cuba.

May 20, 1962 Camilo Guevara March, Che and Aleida's first son, is born.

August 27–September 7, 1962 Che Guevara makes his second visit to the Soviet Union.

October 1962 An international crisis breaks out after US spy planes discover Soviet missile installations in Cuba. Cuba responds by mobilizing its population for defense. Che Guevara is assigned to lead forces in Pinar del Río province in preparation for an imminent US invasion.

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June 14, 1963 Aleida March gives birth to a second daughter, Celia Guevara March.

July 3–17, 1963 Che Guevara visits Algeria, recently independent under the government of Ahmed Ben Bella.

March 25, 1964 Representing the Cuban government, Che Guevara addresses the UN Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva, Switzerland.

November 4–9, 1964 Che Guevara visits the Soviet Union.

December 11, 1964 Che Guevara addresses the UN General Assembly meeting in New York, condemning the US war in Vietnam and supporting independence movements from Puerto Rico to the Congo.

December 17, 1964 Che Guevara leaves New York for Africa, where he visits Algeria, Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), Guinea, Ghana, Tanzania, and Egypt.

February 24, 1965 Ernestito ("Tatico"), Che and Aleida's fourth child, is born in Havana. The same day, Che Guevara addresses the second Economic Seminar of the Organization of Afro-Asian Solidarity in Algiers, controversially urging the socialist countries to do more to support Third World struggles for independence.

March 14, 1965 Che Guevara returns to Cuba and shortly afterwards drops from public view.

April 1, 1965 Che Guevara delivers a farewell letter to Fidel Castro. He then leaves Cuba on a Cuban-sponsored internationalist mission in the Congo, Africa, entering through Tanzania with a passport in the name of Ramón Benítez.

April 18, 1965 In answer to questions about Che Guevara's whereabouts, Fidel Castro informs foreign reporters that Che "will always be where he is most useful to the revolution."

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June 16, 1965 Fidel Castro announces Che Guevara's location will be revealed "when Commander Guevara wants it known."

October 3, 1965 Fidel Castro publicly reads Che Guevara's letter of farewell at a meeting announcing the central committee of the newly formed Cuban Communist Party.

November 21, 1965 Che Guevara leaves the Congo and begins writing up his account of the African mission, which he describes as a "failure."

December 1965 Fidel Castro arranges for Che Guevara to return to Cuba in secret in order to begin preparations for a Cuban-sponsored guerrilla expedition to Bolivia.

January 3–14, 1966 The Tricontinental Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America is held in Havana.

March 1966 Che Guevara returns clandestinely to Cuba and meets with Cuban volunteers selected for the mission to Bolivia at a training camp in Cuba's Pinar del Río province. Meanwhile, the first Cuban combatants arrive in Bolivia to begin advance preparations for a guerrilla movement. Fellow Argentine Tamara Bunke ("Tania") has already been working there since 1964.

November 4, 1966 Che Guevara arrives in La Paz, Bolivia, in disguise, using a Uruguayan passport in the name of Adolfo Mena González.

November 7, 1966 Che Guevara and several others arrive at a farm on the Ñacahuazú River where the guerrilla group will be based. Che makes the first entry in his diary of the Bolivia campaign.

December 31, 1966 Che Guevara meets with the secretary of the Bolivian Communist Party, Mario Monje. There is

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disagreement over perspectives for the planned guerrilla movement.

March 1967 The first guerrilla military action takes place in a successful ambush of Bolivian army troops and the formation of the National Liberation Army (ELN) of Bolivia is publicly announced.

April 16, 1967 Publication of Che Guevara's "Message to the Tricontinental," which calls for the creation of "two, three, many Vietnams."

April 17, 1967 The guerrilla detachment led by Joaquín (Vilo Acuña) is separated from the rest of the unit. The separation is supposed to last only a few days, but the two groups are never able to reunite.

April 20, 1967 French intellectual Regís Debray and Ciro Bustos are arrested after having spent several weeks with the guerrilla unit in Bolivia. They are subsequently tried and sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment.

May–June 1967 US Special Forces arrive in Bolivia to train the counterinsurgency troops of the Bolivian army, which carries out a massacre of miners and their families at the Siglo XX mines.

July 1, 1967 President Barrientos publicly announces that Che Guevara's presence in Bolivia has been discovered.

July 31–August 10, 1967 The Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) conference is held in Havana in support of the guerrilla movements throughout Latin America. Che Guevara is elected honorary chair.

August 1967 A deserter leads the Bolivian army to the guerrilla's main supply cache. Documents discovered lead to the arrest of key urban contacts.

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October 8, 1967 After an entire guerrilla detachment is ambushed and annihilated several weeks earlier, the remaining group of 17 guerrillas is trapped by the Bolivian army and fight a desperate battle in El Yuro ravine. Che Guevara is seriously wounded and captured.

October 9, 1967 Che Guevara and two other captured guerrillas (Willy and Chino) are murdered by Bolivian soldiers following instructions from the Bolivian government and Washington. The remains of Che Guevara and the other guerrillas are secretly buried in Bolivia.

October 15, 1967 On Cuban television, Fidel Castro confirms news of Che Guevara's death and declares three days of official mourning in Cuba. October 8 is designated the Day of the Heroic Guerrilla. Three days later, Fidel delivers a memorial speech for Che Guevara in Havana's Revolution Plaza before an audience of almost one million people.

Mid-March 1968 Microfilm of the pages of Che's Bolivian diary arrives in Cuba.

July 1968 Che Guevara's *Bolivian Diary* is published in Cuba and distributed free of charge to the Cuban people. It is simultaneously published in many countries to counter the CIA campaign to discredit the revolutionary movement in Latin America. With an introduction by Fidel Castro, it becomes an instant international bestseller.

July 1997 Almost 30 years after his murder, Che Guevara's remains and those of other guerrilla fighters are finally located in Bolivia and returned to Cuba to be buried together in a new memorial built in the central Cuban city of Santa Clara, where Che led a famous military victory in the revolutionary war.

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Introduction

"Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."
Ernesto Che Guevara

Letters often reveal the innermost thoughts and emotions of a writer, an intellectual or artist, or, in this case, a revolutionary, who had both an outstanding intellect and a brilliant pen. Ernesto Guevara de la Serna — or "Che" as the world came to know him — was an inveterate letter writer and diarist throughout his short but extraordinary life. His letters and diaries are those of a master narrator, characterized by a brutal honesty, a remarkable lack of ego, a razor-sharp wit, an iron will and a great capacity to express his love and affection for his closest friends and family.

More than 80 percent of the letters in this selection of Che Guevara's correspondence has never been translated previously and published in English. Beginning with the letters young Ernesto penned in his early travels around Latin America as a medical student, the reader can observe how he polished his unique style over the years. And as Ernesto is transformed into "Che" (a common way Argentines refer to themselves and are referred to by others), a dedicated revolutionary and original political thinker emerges from the wide-eyed young Argentine who set out to discover Latin America. "Each one of us is the architect of a new type of human being," wrote Che years later, "for the new society we seek to create," and it is that process of becoming or transformation that the reader can witness here in his letters.

Although he was never a student radical during his time at university, by 1954 he is writing to his mother from Guatemala,

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saying: "the Americas will be the theater of my adventures in a way that is much more significant than I could have imagined. I think I have really come to understand it and I feel [Latin] American, which means having a character distinct from all other peoples on the earth."

Always an uncompromising seeker of the truth, committed only to what he described as "the sacred cause of the liberation of humanity," in one of his last letters to his young children, Che advised them to "always be capable of feeling deeply any injustice committed against anyone, anywhere in the world. This is the most beautiful quality in a revolutionary."

His final letters to his partner Aleida, his children and Fidel Castro are both nostalgic and wistful, while also reiterating his unwavering commitment to his ideals. "Many will call me an adventurer," Che wrote to his parents before leaving Cuba in 1966 on his fateful mission in Bolivia, "and that I am, only one of a different sort: one who risks his neck to prove his truths."

As Che's daughter Aleida comments: "When you write a speech, you pay attention to the language, the punctuation and so on. But in a letter to a friend or a member of your family, you don't worry about those things. It is you speaking, in your authentic voice. That's what I like about these letters; they show who Che really was. This is the true political testimony of my father."

A few of these letters are well known, but most have only now been released from Che Guevara's personal archive held at the Che Guevara Studies Center in Havana, directed by his widow Aleida March, and are published in English for the first time. This selection, compiled chronologically, presents letters from different moments of Che's life, offering a new and intimate insight into the motivation, emotions and actions of an extraordinary human being. Living only 39 years, Che had an impact on our lives and dreams as few have had in all of human history.

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LETTERS FROM YOUTH
(1947–1956)

Introduction

A dedicated diarist from his youth, Ernesto candidly recorded his thoughts and experiences in letters to friends and family and took prodigious notes on the extensive reading program he set himself. The first letters in this volume were written at the age of 18 when Ernesto first leaves his family home in Buenos Aires. Having graduated from high school at the end of 1946, he trains as a soil technician and then goes to work with his school friend Tomás Granado at the Department of Highways in the city of Villa María.

In January 1950, Ernesto uses the summer break in his medical studies to explore 12 provinces of his native Argentina on a motorized bicycle. He keeps a travel diary, in which he describes much of the territory he travels through as arid and inhospitable, where the population lives in poverty and isolation, in stark contrast to the prosperity enjoyed by middle-class Argentine families like his in the urban centers.

Before completing his medical degree, in December 1951, Ernesto and his - compañero Alberto Granado (Tomas' brother) undertake an extended trip through the continent of Latin America, setting out on a vintage Norton motorcycle, "El Poderoso, II" (Mighty One, the Second), which only makes it as far as Chile. The travelers continued by hitchhiking to Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, spending some time in a leper colony in the Amazon.

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After spending a month in Miami, Ernesto returns to Buenos Aires on a cargo plane loaded with horses. These adventures are portrayed in a posthumously published book and popular movie, "The Motorcycle Diaries."[1]

As a newly graduated doctor in 1953, Ernesto heads off on yet another journey that takes him back through the Andes and on to Central America, where he witnesses the aftermath of the 1952 Bolivian revolution and the 1954 CIA-backed overthrow of the popularly elected government of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala. These experiences profoundly influence the young Argentine's political world view.[2]

Up until the moment he is first introduced to Fidel Castro in Mexico in 1955 by Cuban friends he had made in Guatemala, Ernesto is still aiming for a successful career as a medical researcher and dreaming of traveling to Europe where he plans to meet up with his mother in Paris. His letters home still give the impression that these are his goals, but in reality he has begun training with the Cubans for the guerrilla expedition back to Cuba to combat a military dictatorship that emerged from a coup in March 1952.

His correspondence during these years already displays an inimitable style, an astute wit and wry sense of humor, a loyalty to friends and a deep affection for his family, especially his mother and maternal aunt Beatriz. What is most notable, however, is young Ernesto's intense quest to understand the world and a readiness to call out injustice or barbarity whenever and wherever he encounters it, foreshadowing his future revolutionary trajectory.

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1 See Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey* (Seven Stories Press, 2021).

2 See Ernesto Che Guevara, *Latin America Diaries: The Sequel to* The Motorcycle Diaries (Seven Stories Press, 2021).

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To Father[3]

Villa María, January 21, 1947

My dearest *Viejo* [old man],[4]

I received the money you sent the other day and, without a doubt, it arrived at just the right time. I didn't respond to you before because my situation was still up in the air.

They have silenced me and sent me to Villa María. What I like about this is that I'll have to behave like a supervisor and I'll be able to use the time to try to improve myself. For now, I have to work hard because the previous laboratory technician was a first-rate bum. I'll have to carry out trials that have accumulated and are equivalent to 10 kilometers of the project. However, after 10 days of work I hope the situation will have improved a bit and that I'll have time to study.

I am waiting for news from Osvaldo Payer, who went to Uruguay to ask about the programs. If I can do them free of charge I'll stay all winter, as I have worked out that I can save between 80 and 100 pesos a month. My wage is 200 plus board, which means that my costs are simply food and buying some books to distract myself. My address is Vélez Sarsfield… Villa María.

I'm about 10 blocks from the center.

Chau and love from

Ernesto

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3 Ernesto Guevara completed his secondary education in 1946 at the age of 18. He then trained as a soil technician and worked for a while with his friend from high school, Tomás Granado, in the Department of Highways in the city of Villa María, from where he wrote the following two letters.

4 This was the affectionate way Che addressed his parents.

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To Father

Villa María, [late] 1947

My dearest *Viejo*,

I can see that you are very worried about the issue with the truck. The company wasn't doing me any "favor," I was doing them a favor because it is their obligation to provide me with a vehicle and peons that are up to the task, and I don't think the workforce is even remotely up to it.

As of now my main concern is food, because the company had previously paid for this, and it seems to me a bit like a "bribe." The only thing left for me to do is to consult with the boss (who is a first-rate bribe taker) and do what he says.

This famous Department of Highways has turned out to be little more than a club of bribe takers.

The person in charge told me that, in 20 years, I have been the only laboratory technician he had known who has not accepted the food, and one of only two or three who didn't take bribes.

You were worried that I would be too lenient on them, but in fact I have made them dig up and compact a good chunk of the road, and am now carrying out some of the postponed trials. If these fail, they will have to dig 80 centimeters (deep) and compact the road in three layers, meaning they will have a terrible job ahead of them. (It seems to me that there is something suspicious going on.)

Well, *Viejo,* hugs,

Ernesto

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To AMERIMEX[5]

Buenos Aires, February 28, 1950
"Year of the Liberator General San Martín"

Manager
AMERÍMEX S.R.L.
Calle Reconquista. 575.
Cap. Fed. [Buenos Aires]

Dear Sirs,

I am sending you a "Micron" motor, which you represent, with which I have traveled 4,000 kilometers through 12 Argentine provinces. The motor worked perfectly during my extensive trip and it was only at the end that I realized it had lost pressure, which is why I am sending it to you for repairs.

Yours sincerely,

Ernesto Guevara Serna

5 This letter was written after Ernesto's extensive trip around Argentina in the summer of 1950 on a motorized bicycle. It was published in the magazine *El Gráfico*, as publicity for the Argentine company AMERIMEX, which sold Micron motors.

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