ICWA LETTERS

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Institute of Current World Affairs
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Martha Farmelo is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues and contemporary politics in Argentina.

Final Report

[Transcript of a speech delivered at the Members and Trustees meeting of the Institute of Current World Affairs, Monmouth, NJ, June 14, 2003]

By Martha Farmelo

Imagine a country where politicians are spat upon when they show their faces in public, where groups of people meet on street corners to decide how to run their neighborhoods.

Imagine a country where middle-class men and women pound with hammers on metal bank-fronts, where workers break into and run abandoned factories.

Imagine a country where thousands of unemployed men and women block highways demanding food and workfare.

This is neither France in 1968 nor civil-war Spain. This is Argentina after December 2001.

Martha and son Camilo

Over the last 20 years or so, had ICWA tried, the Institute could not have picked a more gripping and opportune time than the last two years to have a Fellow based in Argentina. Tonight I'm going to talk about the political and social significance of those two years and about my original topic, changing gender roles.

Without a doubt, the most central and mind-blowing days of my two-year stay in Argentina were December 19th and 20th, 2001. These were the days of pot-banging protests called *cacerolazos* that threw out President Fernando de la Rúa.

Argentina had been in a hideous recession for more than three years. Everyone was reeling from the announcement of banking restrictions called *el corralito*, the little playpen. Suddenly no one could withdraw more than 250 dollars or pesos from the bank each week. At that point the exchange rate was still pegged at one-to-one.

Suddenly there was hardly any cash flowing through the system. Middle-class people took buses instead of cabs. They fell behind on paying their rent and

their housekeepers. The directors of my son's pre-school could barely pay his teachers.

On December 19th, my stomach clutched when I saw looters on television screaming, "We're hungry!" and "We want to work!" That night at about 10:45, President de la Rúa declared a state of siege that suspended all constitutional rights and guarantees.

That was the detonator.

Less than a minute after he said the words "state of siege," I heard one person begin to bang a metal pot on a nearby balcony. Bang! Bang! Bang! Within a few seconds, we heard a few more, and then many more, and then boom: it was a full-blown *cacerolazo*. For half an hour, we had to shout to be heard.

At about 11:30 pm, my partner Alan and I were sitting on our tenth-floor balcony, trying to analyze what had just happened. We suddenly realized that a massive column of people was marching down our street, which is a wide avenue. We hung over the edge of the balcony in a state of shock for the eight or ten minutes it took the group of a couple of thousand people to march on by. They were whacking their pots and pans and chanting entirely vulgar slogans against the economy minister, Domingo Cavallo.

There were people of all ages with lots of kids and babies. They seemed to have mobilized spontaneously with no apparent leaders. At the front of the march were just some middle-class men and women in polo shirts, Bermuda shorts and sandals walking along. There was no sign of a political party, union or any other organizational force, just the light-blue-and-white Argentine flag.

This was no ordinary uprising. Later there were rumors of civil war, but there were never two armed groups fighting to control power. Rather, this was the people *en masse*, taking on their political class, and they were unarmed except for their deafening saucepans.

That night, about half an hour after the first group marched on by, another noisy crowd passed, and similar marches took place in other parts of the country. Angry and jubilant Argentines filled the historic Plaza de Mayo and at around 1:00 a.m., Cavallo resigned.

The next morning, December 20th, things seemed quiet and I went for a swim at my pool downtown. A few hours later and just a mile away, the police attempted to empty the Plaza de Mayo. They shot at protestors with tear gas, rubber bullets, and lead bullets as well. Seven people died, bringing the death toll to 33. That evening, President de la Rúa resigned. He fled in a helicopter that rose above the *Casa Rosada,* the presidential offices, and whisked him away.

Today the term "December 20th" is shorthand for that chain of events. Like many Argentines, after December 20th I felt a clash of impotence, elation, grief, hope and fear, all mixed together.

"*Que se vayan todos!*" was the unifying slogan that emerged during the uprising. It means roughly "Out with all of them!" meaning all politicians, quite literally. "*Que se vayan todos!*" has taken hold as a persistent demand and a defining point of political debate in Argentina.

Still, a year and a half later, no one has gone anywhere. The recent presidential election was closely disputed between five candidates. The Peronist party is so splintered that it was unable to hold a primary and ran three candidates instead of one. Elisa Carrió was the only alternative to business-as-usual. She has broken new ground as a woman with no name recognition, prestige or party base inherited from a father, husband, brother or political boss. But her party had a weak organizational base and she refused to accept corporate campaign funding, which crippled her ability to compete.

A run-off was scheduled between former President Carlos Menem —who for most Argentines embodies the past—and Néstor Kirchner, a little-known Peronist governor from the Patagonia. At that point Kirchner looked like a mere continuation of the administration of Eduardo Duhalde, his predecessor, and even announced his intention to keep Duhalde's economy minister. When the polls showed Menem was doomed to a smashing defeat, he withdrew. This made Kirchner the president with the unfortunate distinction of having the slimmest voter mandate in Argentine history.

Some Argentines argue that nothing changed after December 20th, while others argue that the uprising was a major turning point for Argentina. I fall between the two, leaning toward the latter.

Those who say that nothing changed point to everything I've just told you about the recent election to prove their point. They also slap their back pockets to say that the middle class rose up only because of the *corralito*, because the government reached into their pockets. It's also common wisdom that the Peronist party machine incited much of the looting and protests that spurred the resignations of de la Rúa and seven-day President Adolfo Rodríguez Saá, who followed him. Obviously, "people power" was only one part of the equation.

They also point out that the economy spent another entire year in a freefall that only recently began to bounce back, and that all the while there was notable silence among the middle class—or what's left of it. Although December 20th appeared to herald the end of the IMF-driven, free-market economic model in Argentina, what really died was the consensus that supported it. Although Kirchner has made some important changes, the

model itself is still intact. Despite a gargantuan window of opportunity, the popular movement and the political opposition were utterly unable to articulate a viable political alternative or otherwise demand change.

In this vein, I would argue that Argentina's crisis is ultimately political, not economic. And of course, any political crisis has deep cultural dimensions. In Argentina, the cultural issues have to do with a tenacious passivity, rampant individualism and a profound disintegration of the social fabric. These things are extremely difficult to change.

However, in my mind, those who say that December 20th was a turning point are speaking of just that: cultural change. First, they recall that the uprising was a response to the state of siege—and they're right. As if by magic, in that moment, gone was the persistent fear and passivity so characteristic of post-dictatorship Argentina.

Similarly, with rare exception, after December 20th politicians, judges, bankers and union leaders could no longer show their faces in public without being yelled at in shopping malls, or restaurants, or when they walked down the street. Argentines have taken a collective form of justice into their own hands, which they call the *escrache*. Former President Raúl Alfonsín got in a fistfight during an *escrache* in front of his apartment building.

Furthermore, in one breath Argentines speak of three so-called "new social actors" that came to the fore after December 20th. The first are the *piqueteros*, the organized unemployed who use roadblocks all over the country to protest for food and jobs. These working-class men and women draw the attention of government officials and all Argentines by blocking roads, bridges and highways with tree branches and burning tires.

The second new social actor is the hundreds of neighborhood assemblies that emerged from the *cacerolazos*, calling for direct democracy. Shortly after December 20th, pot-banging protestors continued to gather on street corners. They put down their saucepans and began to organize themselves and to ask, "What kind of country do we want?"

The third new social actor is the growing number of groups of workers who have seized and run shuttered factories, despite violent police repression. Often business owners close factories from one day to the next, leaving hundreds of working-class families unemployed. In many cases the workers break the lock on the factory doors and put the place back in operation, turning it into a cooperative. Today there are approximately 140 worker-run factories that employ 15,000 workers.

The political and economic weight of these new actors is somewhat marginal. However, they're of great consequence for the way they fire up the collective imagination and challenge the status quo, especially power relationships. In addition to shaking scores of Argentines out of their traditional passivity, December 20th stimulated alliances between the middle class and unemployed workers that were unthinkable just before. In the process, Argentines are reweaving their tattered social fabric.

I've seen this take place before my eyes the Friday nights I've worked at the soup kitchen organized by our local neighborhood assembly. One neighbor donates 16 pounds of beef each week. Volunteers collect crates of food donated by local green-grocers. They lug two massive pots and a tank of propane to a street corner next to the Botanical Garden.

This same scene, repeated night after night on street corners throughout Buenos Aires and the entire country, is truly a sight to see. The chief cook at my soup kitchen is José María, an unemployed chef. After four hours on his feet preparing the stew, he works the streets until dawn, rummaging through garbage for cardboard, paper and other recyclable goods to sell in order to survive.

Try to imagine two crouched-over, well-dressed ladies of means named Marina and Catalina, who are 82 and 88-years-old. Their small hands, twisted by arthritis, cut, peel and dice just the same. Those two are treated like queens by the assistant cook. He is another garbage-picker with ratty clothes and wild hair that recall his days of addiction to drugs and alcohol.

I have heard more than one volunteer say, "This is incredible. A few months ago each one of us was cooped up in our apartment, and today we're out in the street, doing something together."

So how does this all add up? Where is Argentina heading?

I kid you not, that most Argentines, including those I consider the experts, will tell you, "Who knows?"

Let me share a fear, and a hope.

My fear is that despite some exciting changes, the depth of cultural change Argentina needs to thrive will be nearly impossible to achieve. I fear that driven by their culture of passivity, most Argentines will come to accept the current state of affairs as "natural" — even a nearly 60-percent poverty rate. They're already accustomed to corrupt politicians and prolonged economic crisis. I'm afraid that with a little bit of bread and a little bit of circus—with escape valves like emigration, workfare subsidies and 4,000 barter clubs—things may remain unchallenged. Argentines will continue to rant and insist that their country is a piece of *ca-ca*, but little will change.

My hope is that I'm wrong. My hope is that more

and more Argentines will continue the process of reinventing their society, of creating new alliances and trying new solutions to their political and economic problems.

Peter Martin told me that Argentines need just one person: a charismatic leader to pull them out of this mire.

I'm sorry, Peter. I disagree.

I think Argentines have had it with personalistic leadership and need to deepen their democracy, work for collective solutions and reweave their social fabric in the process. It's not clear what will happen to the once-formidable middle class, which until a few years ago distinguished Argentina from the entire rest of Latin America. In the last four years, an entire quarter of the population—the bulk of the middle class—slid under the poverty line, doubling the number of poor Argentines. This newly-poor quarter of the population is still culturally middle-class, and it will take a few generations of working as garbage pickers for that to change.

When I set out on my fellowship, Argentina was, as always, a fascinating and enigmatic place. It also happened to be experiencing one hell of an economic crisis. In the last two years Argentina has transformed itself into a social and political laboratory and to a large extent an economic one, as well.

The hefty role of women in December 20th, and within the new social actors, is a rich study in gender issues, the original topic of my fellowship. However, I was interested in looking beyond women's issues to see what changes in gender roles and identity might be occurring for men and boys.

Some of the gender-related contradictions in Argentina are simply stunning. The night an Argentine sit-com showed a presumably heterosexual man passionately kiss his male, transvestite maid, I was flabbergasted by the open-mindedness of it all. Two seconds later, a commercial showed a darkly tanned, body-sculpted woman in a miniscule bikini, slathered in baby oil, assuming all manner of sexual poses. The contrast took my breath away.

Sometimes the issues are less eye-catching, but even more significant. For example, polls show Argentines are remarkably progressive on gay rights. Last year the city of Buenos Aires legalized domestic partnership for gay couples, as did the small interior province of Río Negro just two months ago.

On the other hand, one time I told my friend Diana that when Camilo was little, I had painted his pinky fingers with red nail polish. Can you guess what she said?

In all seriousness, she told me, "Watch out, Martha—you're going to turn your son into a *maricón*," a queer.

In the realm of paid work, I saw countless women doctors, lawyers and police officers, and numerous women making headway in non-traditional areas like biology and chemical engineering. Thanks to Argentina's quota law, women make up 35 percent of the Congress, compared to only 14 percent in the U.S. Furthermore, the massive province of Buenos Aires passed an unprecedented law that punishes sexual harassment in the public-sector workplace.

On the other hand, it is still legal and entirely common for want ads to specify that a job opening is for a woman only, that she must be under 30 or 35 years old, and "*de buen aspecto*," literally, "of good appearance," which is code for "nice looking."

What about the division of domestic labor between men and women at home? This is a topic close to my heart. During my time in Argentina, I came to three conclusions.

The first conclusion is that a mini-gender revolution is taking place. I repeatedly saw with my own eyes how men are participating far more in childcare and domestic chores than ever before. This change is sometimes linked to continually rising male unemployment and the fact that many men are at home while their female partners are out there working.

Some of you may recall the newsletter about José Luis Mendoza, the working-class house-husband who bucks all the stereotypes of *machista* men. This guy has the physique of the giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk* but the grace of Mikhail Baryshnikov. When I met him he was pouring hot water from a delicate tin tea kettle into a small gourd so we could have some *mate*, the bitter argentine tea that is drunk through a silver straw.

José Luis cooks. He cleans the house. He does the laundry and takes care of eight children. That's quite a job.

I also saw signs of this mini-revolution on television, which for me is one of the most important indicators of change. I definitely took note when midday commercials showed men shopping for things like laundry detergent.

Also, there's a daytime program for home-makers called "Mariana de Casa," which is a play on the term *ama de casa*, which means housewife. When Mariana went on vacation, two men ran the show in her absence. Keep in mind the role television plays in socializing kids: I learned that tidbit about the male hosts from my five-year-old son.

My second conclusion is that such transformations in male gender roles are not transitory, but are here to stay. I finally found social-science research that confirmed my sense that the number of married women with chil-

Alan Cibils and son Camilo

dren entering the work force constitutes a big social revolution in Argentina. The corollary is that more men of all social classes are helping out at home, though they do far more child-rearing than housework, very much like in the United States.

So are these changes lasting or are they transitory?

Are they like the U.S. during World War II when women entered the work force in droves but didn't stay after the war ended? If the Argentine economy recovers and employment levels increase, will men and women return to more traditional roles as they did after World War II?

I answer with a resounding, "No."

I believe that Argentina's values are changing. Also, more and more children like José Luis' eight kids are being socialized to see women working outside the home, and men sharing domestic tasks inside the home.

Some of you may remember reading about my friend's parents, the 60-year-old couple, Victoria and Martín. Their chronic unemployment led them to sell everything, abandon Argentina and start their lives all over again in Spain. By the way, I'm sad to say they're moving back to Argentina in a few short months.

Victoria was forced to work for the first time at age 58, which made her furious, and left her husband humiliated. It's true that many women like Victoria are working only because they must, for their families to eat. Yet many middle-class women are beginning to work for reasons having to do with personal realization. I asked many young women, girls really, about their future. They spoke to me of their plans to work, not just in terms of necessity, but their dreams of becoming a lawyer, a psychologist, or an actor.

On the other hand, my third conclusion emphasizes the "mini" in the mini-revolution I mentioned a few minutes ago. And that's because all this change in gender roles has limits. In fact, as you can imagine, at times I've been absolutely smacked in the face by what has not changed in Argentina. Supposedly women are so-so on the household side, but doing much better in parenting their kids, right?

Ha! Some of you may recall the newsletter I wrote on the organized unemployed who protest with roadblocks. Many unemployed men out in the province of Buenos Aires become severely depressed. As we sat around drinking *mate*, Jorge Valles told me, and I quote, "The man sometimes becomes a hard-core drinker, or physically abusive. He abandons his home, his kids, or he shoots himself."

While Jorge sat shaking his head in disagreement, his colleague María Itatí Gómez told me this about the guys: "They may not have a job but they don't contribute at home. Even when the woman goes out and works, they don't contribute." She also said, "They never change a diaper. Jorge's never changed a diaper," even though he told me that with 11 kids, he certainly had. And she insisted, "They don't take care of the kids. They may even stay home with them without taking care of them."

Back in middle-class Buenos Aires, my friend Diana talks with pride about the time she had a job that lasted well into the evening. Her husband Gustavo had to bathe and feed their two kids—and according to her, it was such a disaster that she had to quit her job. I think Diana felt needed and important. I'm not sure she would like her husband to be any different.

My last comments on gender are about people's reactions to my partner, Alan. When I applied for this fellowship, Peter was concerned about how Alan, who is Argentine, would feel about being financially supported by me. He also wondered about Alan's taking a major role in childcare and housework, all in *machista* Argentina. In the end, so many men are supported by their wives that this was a total non-event.

People did notice how much and how well he cooks, especially his linguine with spicy bacon sauce. A few

male friends complained that this made them look bad. But few of my girlfriends seemed to envy his involvement in Camilo's care or our housework.

Clearly, many Argentine women are responsible for the fact that change in gender roles is so slow. Just as men struggle with a huge loss of identity when they're no longer breadwinners, I'm now convinced that many Argentine women would be totally lost if their roles as mothers and housekeepers were in any way diminished. As a result, the women, not just the men, hold on tightly to that traditional division of labor.

At this point, I'd like to talk a bit more about my experience as a Fellow.

Being an ICWA Fellow is a dream: You and your family live for two years in a spellbinding place while you immerse yourself in the issues you care most passionately about.

But being a Fellow can be surprisingly difficult. For one, I found myself in observation mode almost all the time. It's hard to be fully present to someone when you're analyzing their experiences and feelings for their journalistic juiciness.

Being a Fellow also has some curious advantages. For example, it sparked in me a commitment to a depth of cultural immersion that I would never have undertaken otherwise. With rare exception, I read nothing in English. I do not spend time with North Americans, and even asked friends to hold off visits until the fellowship ends.

The fellowship was also marvelous for Alan and me as a couple. After spending two years in Alan's native land, I know and understand him far better than I ever could while we lived in the U.S. Furthermore, Camilo is now bilingual and bicultural. I can't overstate how significant that is for our family and for him.

I chose to remain an observer while on my fellowship. But I'm ready to become an actor, and we've decided to stay on in Argentina. I'm simply not done yet.

In that vein, although I know I'm risking melodrama, I want to say that by sending me to Argentina, ICWA gave me life.

I thought about this as I was walking home from my pool one day. I was thinking about how our decision to stay on is largely irrational. Every time I try to sum up my life in Argentina, I come back to the newsletter I wrote about the anguish and the wonder of my life there. Also, life has been full of uncertainty, and it is not entirely clear how things will unfold for us after the fellowship ends.

More than that, I wondered, how can Argentina give me life when it is experiencing such a devastating crisis?

As I walked toward the subway, I was feeling stressed about our decision to stay on. I was wishing I had a couple of Tums to chew on to soothe the discomfort I was feeling right here [sternum]. But I took a deep breath and asked myself: What is your body telling you?

And the answer was that although I don't like the uncertainty, I feel alive.

My senses are alive.

My intellect is alive.

I have to think carefully about things, all the time. Somehow I've learned to live more in the moment, and as a result life is much richer.

All this is the result of being in Argentina. All this is the result of being a Fellow: Of being a full-time observer, and of writing about what I see, every single month.

I would like to give my heartfelt gratitude to the McColls and the ICWA trustees for these two life-changing years. I thank my partner Alan for his moral and material support, for listening, and for his insights on people and events. To Camilo, thank you for respecting my time to do my writing and for helping me get to know all your friends. Thank you Peter for your encouragement and nudging suggestions. Many thanks to Brent and Ellen for all their work behind the scenes.

Finally, I want to say thank you to two ICWA trustees for two special moments.

First, two years ago I was here when Jean-Benoît Nadeau gave his final report. As I was heading back to my dorm room, Phil Talbot stopped me by the exit doors and held my forearm. He said, "Wasn't that something?" And then he said, "Just make it yours, Martha. Just make it your fellowship."

Thank you, Phil.

The second was an e-mail from Carol Rose. Shortly after I arrived in Argentina, she wrote this:

Fight those impulses to do "formal" research; this is an experiential time in your life. What were the issues involved in getting Camilo adjusted? What does the place feel, smell, and look like? Where are you living? How do you feel?

Her words had so much impact on me that without trying, I memorized them. I repeatedly said them to myself, and remembered that to truly understand a country and its people you must feel first and then analyze.

Thank you all very much. ❑

Postcript

Buenos Aires, August 15, 2003

Since Néstor Kirchner assumed the Presidency on May 25, 2003, Argentina has been immersed in a host of transitions—and so have I.

Given Kirchner's relative silence during the campaign, coupled with his cozying up to his predecessor, Eduardo Duhalde, most everyone expected nothing more than business-as-usual from the new President. However, in his first 60 days in office, Kirchner has taken a host of progressive measures and steps to transform the way politics are being conducted.

In his first days in office, he replaced the top leadership of the armed forces and the federal police, many of whom had appalling records as human rights abusers. He then took bold steps to bring accountability to the justice system, which could achieve far-reaching and profound changes in Argentine society. First, he went on national television to declare that he would not succumb to blackmail by Julio Nazareno, the chief justice of the Supreme Court and for many Argentines an icon of Menem-era corruption. Just three weeks later, after 13 years on the Court, Nazareno resigned.

Kirchner then issued a decree that democratizes the previously closed-door selection of Supreme Court justices with widely published announcements of nominees' qualifications and mechanisms for organizations and individuals to opine about candidates. In dramatic contrast to several decades of Supreme Court nominations, Kirchner then nominated Raúl Zaffaroni who is eminently qualified, politically independent, and in fact was critical of Kirchner while governor of Santa Cruz.

Early on, Kirchner met with human rights organizations and declared his support for the nullification of the so-called "impunity laws" that protect those who ordered or carried out the torture and disappearance of Argentines during the last dictatorship. On July 26, 2003, Kirchner nullified a decree that prohibited the government from studying extradition requests for crimes related to the dictatorship. There are now 41 military officers and one civilian under arrest in response to an extradition request from Spain.

On the economic front, Kirchner audaciously told the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that Argentina will pay its foreign debt only when the beleaguered economy is once again healthy. He refused to implement two controversial measures the IMF had demanded, and suggested that the Fund's Director, Horst Kohler, come to Argentina—which Kohler did. Kirchner insisted to him that the IMF is largely responsible for Argentina's current economic debacle. He also declared that his administration will review one-by-one its contracts with private foreign companies that have made a killing while running Argentina's public services since the 1990s.

Unfortunately, Kirchner has yet to design, let alone implement, a comprehensive economic program that focuses on reactivation and economic development. Still, many Argentines are decidedly more optimistic about politics, and Kirchner's approval ratings have held at nearly 90 percent. Argentines talk about Kirchner having restored dignity to the Argentine people, and it seems they are expanding their perception of possible changes in politics and public administration.

At the same time, some people are frightened by the speed of the changes. They say that Kirchner has taken on "too many mafias" all at once. When his helicopter made an emergency landing in the last days of July, more than one Argentine wondered if sabotage was at play.

My personal transitions are linked to the conclusion of my fellowship, which ends on August 25, 2003—the two-year anniversary of our arrival in Argentina. I am feeling a loss of identity, and of other things. No more newsletters! No more freedom to do what I want, as much as I want, when I want. No more financial security. I'm both sad and excited.

One could say I'm transitioning back to working, but since my work will be so new to me, it feels like anything but a transition "back." Short of a few days of consulting, I've never been employed in

Argentina, and except for a couple of months more than ten years ago, I've never freelanced before. Moreover, until now I never called myself a writer. So far I've landed a couple of editing and other consulting projects, and Alan has done the same in economic research and writing. I'm also looking forward to starting volunteer work and becoming politically active.

We're also going to make the transition out of our apartment and hope to buy one. Real estate is inexpensive in dollars and a good investment, and we're anxious to live in a place of our own. There's a saying in Spanish: *Casa nueva, vida nueva.* New house, new life.

Meanwhile, another transition is finally having the final-report speech to the ICWA membership behind me. I had been nervous about it for months. How could I possibly sum up these two years in Argentina, or demonstrate that the Institute's outrageously generous investment in me was a good one? Still, the speech went fine, and Camilo even chimed in with a comment and raised his little hand and patiently held it high during the Q and A.

"Mommy, why did you say all those things?" he asked with genuine curiosity. And later, offended, "Why did everyone laugh when I asked my question? I didn't laugh when they asked theirs."

Before I went to the podium I prepared some crib notes to reply to the classic ICWA question, "How did this fellowship change you?" in case I was asked. Here's what I came up with:

My hair is long again. During my two years in Argentina, I abandoned my potato-sack tops and bottoms and enjoy wearing flattering, even snug clothing.

I can tolerate far more uncertainty than ever before. This allows me a lot of freedom—like not having to have a job with a regular paycheck—which is what makes it possible to stay on in Argentina.

I experienced a shift in my analytical framework regarding gender. I set out to look beyond women's issues and to include a focus on men, masculinities, and male identity and gender roles. In the end, I found myself with a much more integrative focus that looks at men and women together, whether at home, in the workplace, in politics—everywhere.

I also learned that there is life beyond activism, and value in that life. First, I realized that I could take two full years off from activism and not just survive, but also feel that my work was valuable. Plus, having learned to live more in the moment, relationships and experiences in and of themselves have a transcendent value that I didn't recognize before.

Finally, the fellowship has turned me into a writer, not just someone who uses writing as a tool for other work. Not only do I believe I can be a writer, I just *was* one for two years!

So, Argentina and I are going through lots of changes. It's an exhilarating time both for me and many Argentines.

Many thanks to all of you who read and commented on the newsletters, and my deepest thanks again to ICWA for an incomparable fellowship.

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Phone: (603) 643-5548
E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net
Fax: (603) 643-9599
Web Site: www.icwa.org

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