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Initial Impressions of Chile

By Peter Keller

May, 2000

PUERTO VARAS, Chile – I have been living in my own world for the past three months, not fully understanding others and not being fully understood. Such is the process of cultural immersion. This is not a new subject for a majority of ICWA members and many, I am sure, have experienced the same sort of feelings. However, for me, this is the first time. And during this process I have had much time to think about and observe my new surroundings. Therefore this newsletter is dedicated to my collection of thoughts and initial impressions of Chile, including the language, the people where I live, the food, and the general culture.

Language

“Yo no sé ni jota” has become one of my favorite expressions in Spanish. It literally means “I don’t know neither J,” but is translated as “I don’t know anything” and I tend to use it often (*Jota* in Spanish is the pronunciation for the letter “j”). Some may think this is self-deprecating, but for me it is a great “ice-breaker,” and opens the door for further conversation with others and thus more Spanish practice for me. Prior to this fellowship I didn’t know Spanish, except for a week-long course in Guatemala in March of 1999 and a few night classes in Washington, DC nearly 10 years ago. Thus in order to make up for this deficit I have spent the past three months studying Spanish in the countries of Peru and Chile prior to the official start of my fellowship. This newsletter will focus on the time spent in Chile.

Learning a new language has been different from what I imagined. I thought it would just be a matter of learning the words in Spanish and directly translating the words from English to form a phrase. But it is not as simple as that. For me, it is more like a computer game, where you need the right code to gain access to the next level. I am also figuring out that learning a new language is teaching me more about English. “This verb in English is equivalent to the present-perfect indicative tense,” my teacher would say to me pointing to the example in our textbook and I would respond, “the what tense?” I am finding out I never learned English the first time. So it seems I will be learning two languages over the next two years. This is my personal challenge and perhaps one of the greater achievements in this life.

Chileans tend to be anxious to hear what foreigners or gringos think of their language and the manner in which they speak it. [In Chile the term “gringo” is not considered an impolite word. There seems to be two definitions of the word: The first is anybody from North America, and the second — as explained to me by Marta, the language school administrator — is anyone with blond hair. She insisted that I was not a gringo because of my dark hair, but I am sure others would differ with her definition.] Chileans will be quick to point out that they speak poorly and are lazy speakers. As a comparison, some Chileans note that Peruvians speak Spanish cleanly and fully enunciate the words. I tend to agree. There is a common practice of dropping the letter “s” in certain words and also breezing over the letter “d” when these letters appear toward the end of a word. For example the phrase “dos más” (meaning “two more”) may sound like “do má.”

A Chilean’s next comment may be about the use of slang in their everyday

communications. There are so many uses of slang, or *Chilenismos*, that a book could be written about the subject. And, as a matter of fact one has, and it is now into the second edition. The book, "*How to Survive in the Chilean Jungle*," is very popular among new arrivals — such as myself. I use it as my second dictionary, or primary one when I know the word I am looking for is not in the authentic dictionary. Here is a short list of *Chilenismos* used in most — conversations:

- Buena onda* – sweet! Positive vibrations
- Cachái* – do you get it, understand?
- Chao* – see ya
- Cuico* – upper class
- Guagua* – baby
- Guatón*- overweight male
- Que lata* – what a bummer!
- Qué onda* – what's up?
- Oye* or *Mira* – hey, look. These are the words used to start or interrupt a conversation.
- Carrete* – a party.

A humorous *Chilenismo* is "*Andar a lo gringo*" which means, "to not wear underwear." The interesting part of this phrase is the insinuation that gringos don't wear underwear. But, I think it is really an indication of the "snug factor" of the way pants are worn in this country compared to North America.

The language school I attended in Pucón, a resort community of 8,000 people in Chile's 9th region, can better be described as a hostel first, restaurant second, and school last. [The country is divided into 13 regions, including the Santiago Region, numbered from north to south.] The back room, with a table and few chairs, served as my classroom for two months. This room is where I spent three hours each day with my professors, Paty and Karin. Usually I had Spanish-conversation classes with Karin from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and grammar classes with Paty from 10:30 a.m. to noon.

Books are very expensive in Chile. For example, I recently went to the local bookstore to buy the Chilean Constitution. It was \$60. I decided not to buy it, but rather look for the sections I wanted on the Internet. It is the same story for all books; as a result we didn't have a textbook for my classes. We worked from photocopies and textbooks Karin and Paty used when they attended University. Moreover, the books they used were printed in Spain for German-language students learning Spanish. Although I took three years of German in high school the span of years since that time has left me with very little comprehension of the language. It was a frustrating process at times, because I couldn't understand the German introductory sentences explaining the lesson, and also some words are different in Spanish Spanish and Chilean Spanish. After I would finish reading a paragraph from a textbook, Karin would usually go back through and tell me which words were different in Chile. Maybe someday I will go to Spain, and will know to use the word *llanta* instead of *rueda* for car wheel, but for



now I figure I have limited space in my brain and duplicative words only complicate the situation.

There seems to be a fascination in Chile's 9th and 10th Regions with anything German or from Germany. The area was once settled by Germans and the influences of central Europe have remained. Professor Karin went to school in Germany and lived there afterwards for 11 years. Paty always seemed to enjoy telling me the German equivalent of the newest Spanish word I just learned. And where I lived in Pucón, the father of the house would introduce me to others not as a person from the United States, but rather as a person whose last name is German.



*On a field trip with my Professor Paty
with the town of Pucón in the background*

Did you know the German language has 200,000 words? I read in a Chilean newspaper recently an article about the influence of English in other languages. (*El Mercurio*, page A2, April 13, 2000). It also compared the number of words in each of the other major languages. English has nearly one million words and Spanish has almost 100,000 words. When I introduce this piece of trivia into a conversation it is usually not well received and the conversation quickly changes direction. Chileans are proud of the diversity of the Spanish they speak and this "fact" does not sit well with them. What they may not realize is that this word total does not include the permutations created by Chileans for many everyday words. By this I mean diminutives, also known as *chiquititos*, such as *pancito*, *tecito*, *agüita*, *cafecito*, and *abuelita*, to name a few. These refer to a little or small bread, tea, water, coffee, and grandmother, respectively. Perhaps if all the diminutives and the multitude of verb conjugations were added to the word count the language would have several hundred thousand words.

One efficiency I have noticed in the language is the method of addressing the children of the family. For instance when parents talk to their kids they address them as *mi hijo* or *mi hija* (my son or daughter) and not by Carlos, Amapola, Carolina or whatever their first names may be. In my U.S. family I have four siblings, and I know this technique would save my parents much embarrassment that they probably feel when addressing each of us by the wrong name — which happens quite often.

Chileans, in general, speak very fast with little intonation to differentiate between words. I cannot find a reason why they speak so fast — but I know it is not because they are in a big hurry. The people I have met always find time

to stop and have conversations anywhere they encounter their friends. The life style is very relaxed, there is always "tomorrow" to finish a project or make a business transaction. This pace of life also applies to driving styles — just step into a crosswalk and the cars will stop. This works in the small towns I have lived in, but I wouldn't advise it in Santiago because I am told that they speak even faster in the capital city — so maybe they are truly in a hurry.

When I ask others for advice on learning the language, the common answer is "patience." And I need to keep reminding myself of this because at times I become frustrated by the fact that I can't just jump into a conversation and say whatever is on my mind or ask a detailed question. I am discovering that learning a language is a long process and one that always continues.

My Companions

Don Arturo was waiting for me as I strolled into the school for my third day of class. He smelled of garlic and looked like he just woke up, but he wore his driving cap with distinction. He was anxious to show me his home, which was where I would be staying the next two months. I put my luggage in his car and we drove ten kilometers west of town to the family farm, *Fundo Los Chilcos*. *Fundo* is a term used to describe the size of a piece of property. In south-central Chile this can range from 30 to 100 acres. As a reference a *Parcela* is smaller in size and an *Estancia* is larger in size. Wild fuchsia (*Fuchsia magellanica*) grow in the area and the Spanish word is *Los Chilcos*, thus the family has chosen this plant to represent their *Fundo*. At the house, he showed me my bedroom, introduced me to his



The view of Volcán Villarrica from my bedroom window

wife Olivia — who was ill at the time — and bade me farewell as he left for two days of business in Temuco — about two hours away. In the room next to mine I could hear voices from the television set, for the volume was turned to the maximum level, blasting out the morning news. Across the hall from my room someone was shouting “LISTO” over and over again at frequent intervals. The occupant next door appeared before my door and nodded at me as he moved at a slow pace toward the bathroom. He looked old, beyond my guessing abilities, and wore a stocking cap plus a heavy wool jacket. I was beginning to think I should have stayed at the hostel in town, but these thoughts would have to wait until later because I had Spanish class in a few minutes and needed to catch the bus back into town.

After class I returned to the *Fundo* for lunch. I met the two employees of the farm, Señora Maria and Jose Antonio, while they prepared the meal and attended to other chores such as collecting the eggs from the chicken coop, feeding the half dozen cats, and picking vegetables from the greenhouse. When lunch was ready the old man I saw that morning, Don Francisco, appeared in the kitchen and took his appointed seat at the dinner table. It was just the two of us for lunch that day. Don Francisco, Olivia’s father, proceeded to tell me his life story after he proudly told me his age. He is 94 years old and has an amazing memory about the details of his life. He grew up on a *hacienda* near Concepción, spending his days riding horses around the ranch. “*El mejor ejercicio que existe,*” was how he repeatedly described this favorite activity of his adolescent years. He worked for the Chilean Telephone Company for 36 years in all parts of Chile. He developed his almost mantra-like philosophy for life during these years with the Telephone Company. The words are still ringing in my head, “*Saber Hacer, Bien, Algo y Rápido.*” If you have knowledge, you do anything asked of you well, do it rapidly you and you will

succeed, according to Don Francisco. After this food for soul and body I felt more at ease about my move to the farm.

That night again I heard the voice across the hall blare out the word “LISTO” repeatedly. It seemed to come from deep within this person’s body as it shot out across the hallway. Finally it stopped and then I heard the room door open. I heard feet dragging extremely slowly, and periodic sharp whacks of wood against wood. This lasted for a few minutes and the person returned to his room. The next morning I finally encountered the source of the voice. It was the 90-year-old *Abuelita* Christina, the mother of Don Arturo. Señora Maria told me that I should not talk to her because the grandmother was a little bit crazy. As the next two months went by, I began to believe her. Almost every night grandma Christina would call out “LISTO,” which meant she was ready to go to the

bathroom. Then she would walk the one-meter distance as her cane pounded the floor.

I enjoyed my time on the farm, but I knew that I needed to get out and talk with people other than my teachers or the folks at the farm. Usually in the afternoon I would return to town after lunch seeking partners for conversation. After a while I developed a routine of going to the tourism agency, the coffee shop and some gift shops, where I en-



The two employees at Fundo Los Chilcos, Jose Antonio and Señora Maria, in the kitchen



Don Francisco, the 94-year-old patriarch of the family

gaged in daily discussion about the weather and what I learned in my classes that day. Everyone I met was pleasantly eager to help me learn his or her native tongue.

After two months of the routine, I was ready to make my next move, to the town of Puerto Varas. Here in Puerto Varas I have moved into a group-house situation, where I live with seven other people in a big place overlooking the city, with a view of Lake Llanquihue and the Osorno Volcano. The owner of the house is Arnt, a Norwegian who came here six years ago on vacation and decided to stay. Everyone else in the house is from Chile, including twin sisters Andrea and Bianca, Anita (a professional cook in a local restaurant) and Carlos, who works at the adventure-travel store. The others include Geraldo, who works in the salmon industry, and Sergio from the far north of Chile who spends his days making furniture. Sergio speaks very quickly and I sometimes wonder if he is making up new words just to confuse me. I call him *Romané*, or sometimes *Gitano*, because he reminds me of a character from the number-one Chilean television program called “*Romané, Amor Gitano*.” It’s a show based on the life style of Gypsies who live in the dry, northern parts of the country. They have their own language and have a noticeable higher pitch in their tone of speech. What’s more, the gypsy men in the show have long hair and are usually unshaven — much like Sergio. Like most men who like to give each other a hard time, he has created a nickname for me also, but it is much too vulgar to be placed within these pages.

Puerto Varas (population 28,000) is larger than Pucón, but most of the population lives in the surrounding countryside so it still has a small town atmosphere like Pucón.

Everybody knows each other and what others are doing. One day I made plans to meet my language study partner and just a half an hour later a friend of Andrea and Bianca, Gabi, stopped by to ask me to take a video to this person. Gabi went about her request as if my meeting was common knowledge reported in the local newspaper. She didn’t even ask to confirm if I had made these plans, which is somewhat unusual because there is a casual attitude about setting appointments and plans evolve and change quickly without much fret or worry.

The Food

Andrea, the older of the twin sisters by three minutes, returned home one evening recently and announced that our house would be hosting a party that night. There was no need for prior planning because most Chileans can adapt to spur-of-the-moment opportunities. The reason for the party was that the Jazz-and-Pop group, “Joe Vasconcello” from Santiago, was in town and had gone river-rafting with some of my housemates. Now they wanted to hold a party in their honor. The food preparation began with the two versions of Chilean salads I have encountered here (sliced tomatoes with onions in oil, and chopped lettuce topped with fresh lemon juice and oil). The next step was to prepare the barbecue, known as an *Asado*, for the hunks of meat that would be cooked throughout the night. During *Asados* I especially like hanging out around the grill, not because I like meat or the smell of smoke from the wood fire, but because Chileans become very excited at just the thought of an *Asado*, let alone the real thing.

The procedure for an *Asado* is simple. Prepare a wood



An Asado at Fundo Los Chilcos

fire in a pit and wait until the wood burns long enough to become glowing red embers. Take a few large hunks of *Carne de Vaca*, skewer them and place over the embers. Horizontal stakes supports the skewers on opposite ends of the rectangular-shaped fire pit. The only marinade is salt — and lots of it, big chunks of salt the size of small pebbles. While the red meat is cooking, the men usually gather around the fire and talk about past *Asados* and their favorite cuts of beef, whether it be ribs, loin, tongue, stomach lining, etc. The excitement builds as the meat darkens and initial cuts are made to satisfy their hunger. The leader of the “ceremony” will generally serve the morsels of meat directly from the barbecue pit to the hands of those gathered around the fire. This process continues for a while until nearly half of the barbecued meat is consumed — what remains is brought into the house for the actual meal.

The *Asado* that night started around 10 p.m., and the last of the meat was eaten around 1 a.m. In between nibbling away at the steaks, the Jazz group played a wide range of their favorites, from Chuck Mangione to John Coltrane.

At the home in Pucón, my (adopted) family also prepared several *Asados*. These were done on the weekends to celebrate a birthday or sometimes for no reason at all. I enjoyed these occasions because it usually meant their friends from the nearby towns of Villarrica or Temuco would be coming for a visit. When friends of the family came to visit they also brought food and drinks to celebrate the occasion, plus interesting sto-

ries that made me feel more connected to Chilean culture.

One such time was Easter weekend, the most important holiday of the year for Don Arturo’s family. Señora Maria prepared a wide range of specialties, from seafood *empanadas* to *Curanto* and *Postre de Castañas*. A seafood *empanada* consisted of a filling of salmon, abalone, onions, pepper, cumin and oil cooked together and placed on a rolled-out dough, then folded over and pinched together prior to final stage of frying in a deep pan of oil. *Curanto* is a type of hearty soup with various types of seafood, chicken, ham, and some vegetables. During our Easter-Sunday meal the juice from this soup, almost as thick as gravy from a Thanksgiving dinner, was served in tall glasses for drinking. The thought of drinking gravy all by itself did not excite me, but to the rest

of the family this was a delicacy they seemed to have been waiting for all year. I eventually tried the drink — but have not acquired the habit just yet. The *Postre de Castañas* (Chestnut desert) does not look appetizing because it looks like a jar full of eyeballs, but the taste was the highlight of my meal. These ping-pong ball size nuts were collected from the chestnut trees on the farm. They were prepared by peeling the shell and boiling the nuts for one hour in a mixture of Cognac and sugar. Served in heavy cream, the desert was a sinful way of completing an extremely rich and delicious meal.

During weekdays the usual routine of meals at my



Lunch of salmon, rice and redwine

home was a light breakfast, a large lunch and an optional dinner. Each breakfast consisted of a banana, tea and bread topped with my favorite spread of Manjar (a thick, chocolate-flavored topping). Lunch took place around one-thirty and included several courses. My job was to pour the wine, and Don Arturo made sure I didn't slack off by nudging me on the shoulder whenever he noticed a cup was running dry. We started the meal with salad and/or soup. The soup ranged from a chicken broth to a thicker type stew, such as *Cazuela*, which is made with potatoes, carrots, pumpkin and chicken or beef on the bone. The main course varied from a savory salmon fillet cooked in a white-wine sauce, to pasta with a red sauce, to mashed potatoes with several fried eggs on top. The dessert-and-coffee course included a variety of cakes, puddings and fruits. All of it was delicious. Afterwards we would each return to our rooms and enjoy an afternoon *siesta*. Later in the afternoon we would start stirring around the house continuing our work schedules — for me, studying Spanish. At 5 p.m. sharp Señora Maria would enter the main part of the house and from the detached kitchen and announce “*Onces!*” The origin of the word *Once* (meaning eleven in Spanish) for this meal has several different versions, but the most prominent comes from by-gone days when some people used to drink *aguardiente* (note 11 letters), a strong home brewed alcohol. Rather than saying ‘*aguardiente*’ they would say ‘*vamos a tomar onces*’ so that perhaps the boss or the family would not understand their intention.

Most of the food we ate had some ingredients that came from *Fundo Los Chilcos* or were used to trade for other products. A list of ingredients originating on the farm included eggs, chicken, lettuce, carrots, spinach, apples, chestnuts, moscata berries used for marmalade, cilantro, peppers, garlic and an occasional sheep. Some food even included animals that were just passing through. One day Jose Antonio and I were in the kitchen discussing how many eggs the chickens produce each day, when he heard a flock of *Loro* birds land in a large Oak tree next to the house. He grabbed his rifle from behind the refrigerator and swiftly — yet quietly — walked out to the tree. There were at least 50 *Loros* in the tree and he quickly aimed at one and shot, but missed. He reloaded while the bright green birds continued to chirp, apparently unconcerned that they were in danger. With the next shot, Jose Antonio hit a bird and it fell to the ground. We ran over to it and the *Loro* was still alive but injured enough not to fly away. While Jose Antonio reloaded again the other birds were alarmed by the commotion beneath them and flew away. Jose Antonio wanted to shoot more, though he was satisfied with only one. He picked it up in a burst of excitement and told me this would be dinner later that

night. In Chile, if the food tastes good, the people will get it from anywhere.

Popular Culture

While I lived on the farm I got into a nightly habit of watching the news. I have determined that there are only three major news stories in the country now: The Pinochet case, sports, and unexplained phenomena. The proceedings of the General Augusto Pinochet case is an obvious new story and I will leave that subject to the major news outlets for reporting. The second subject, sports, can lead off the news and last for a half-hour, even when there are



Fundo Los Chilcos with the greenhouse on the left, chicken coop in the center, and main house with detached kitchen on the hill.

only two major sports in the country, soccer and tennis. The World Cup for soccer is still two years away (Korea-Japan 2002), but you wouldn't think that here. The elimination rounds for selecting the best teams within the continent are taking place now, and the intensity grows as each match is played. The week prior to the soccer game against Argentina the news led off with what the coaches and players said that day during practice sessions. Still a week away from the big game I could feel the pressure building and actually started to feel some compassion for the players.

Chile has two super-stars in the sports world. Both have the first name Marcelo — Salas the soccer player and Rios the tennis player. Marcelo Rios was the number-one ranked tennis player in the world several months ago, and now is number 13. Marcelo Salas plays professional soccer in Europe for an Italian team, but he regularly comes back to Chile to play in the World Cup elimination round. Whenever either sports star arrives at the airport from a trip abroad there is a mass of reporters waiting at the gate ea-

ger to get their dozens of questions answered.

Recently in Santiago, during a Davis-Cup tennis match between Argentina and Chile, the umpire made a decision in favor of the Argentine player on whether the ball landed inside or outside the court. The fans, already riding a wave of emotions from a victory earlier that day in the first match, began to shout at the umpire. He warned the crowd to be quiet, but the fans became even more aggressive. He gave the fans at the filled-to-capacity tennis stadium another warning with the threat that the Argentine team would receive a point if they did not quiet down. They became even louder. He awarded a point to Argentina and the fans overreacted by throwing plastic chairs onto the court. The players ran off the court as chairs, cups and trash came raining down from the stands. The rest of the match was canceled. Afterwards Davis-Cup official ruled that the Chilean Team is banned from Davis-Cup play this year and next year no matches will be played in Chile. Sports is serious business here for the fans, but I am afraid they won't have much to cheer about in the future because the soccer team is doing poorly — having lost to Argentina, Uruguay and tying with Peru — and the Davis-Cup play will not be returning to Chile for two more years.

The third notable news story is a mix of UFO sightings and reports of unseen creatures called *Chupacabras*. They seem to always be aired together and there is suspicion building that there is a link between the two. *Chupacabras* are creatures that, according to sketches and computer animations, look like a cross between a large bat and a gargoyle. They work at night and suck the blood from goats, leaving the dead carcasses in the pen for the owner to find in the morning. Many people believe in both *Chupacabras* and UFOs. The level of attention given to both these subjects often surprises me. The nightly news will run stories of interviews with witnesses, specialists in the field of phenomena, and the police investigating these incidents — all of it in a serious tone of voice. It would be hard for me to imagine Tom Brokaw giving the pitch to this story without a grin.

One trend I have noticed during radio and television programs is that nearly all interviews are accompanied by background music. This includes radio talk shows and longer interviews with popular personalities, similar to the "Tonight Show" or "David Letterman." As far as I'm concerned, the music is distracting when I am trying to concentrate on understanding the words spoken in the interview. Perhaps the music, usually something like elevator muzak, is soothing to the general audience or the interviewer. Someday it may perform the same function for me.

One of my favorite television programs is called "Patiperros." This program travels around the world in search of Chileans that live and work in other countries. These are in-depth stories about life abroad in such places as Mali, France, Florida and Las Vegas. Although Chile is a large country — the longest in the world, stretching 4,270 kilometers from north to south — the population is only 15

million and I really get the sense that small-town practice of taking an interest in others. It is not uncommon to be at a social gathering where all the people know each other and their families. It is also not surprising to see the leaders of the country or other famous people casually passing by during your daily routine. One day during Spanish class I saw through the open door to the restaurant the former President of Chile, Patricio Aylwin, walk by with his family. They'd come to eat lunch. He was the first president after the 17-year rule of General Pinochet. If I had not recognized him from the pictures I'd seen of him in the paper I would not have known who he was. There were no "secret service" forces scanning the building or limousines waiting out front.

Recently Chile conducted its third presidential election since the departure of Pinochet in 1990. It was a very clean process and Ricardo Lagos was elected after the second round with 51 percent of the vote. He represents the Socialist party (*Socialista*) and the opposition, led by Joaquin Lavín, represented the Independent Party (*Union Demócrata Independencia*). The election took place six weeks prior to my arrival in Chile, but the signs of the campaign are still prevalent. I noticed one day on my return from a hike to the three-lakes district of Huerquehue National Park, that on the road was painted "LAGOS 5" (lakes 5). I thought to myself that this was an interesting way of marking a tourist route, but there were only three lakes and not five as painted on the road. In the next few days I saw this slogan painted on the walls of bus-stop shelters, on the roofs of barns, and other roads. One day I also saw "LAVIN 6" painted on the roads and finally I figured it out — these were campaign advertisements and the number related to the ballot number on the voting card for each presidential candidate. Very ingenious and cheap, but I don't think you'll be seeing "GORE" or "BUSH" painted on the concrete and asphalt of Interstate 95 any time soon.

The law-enforcement agency that patrols the highways, investigates crimes and maintains border crossings with Argentina, Bolivia and Peru is the same organization throughout Chile. These are the *Carabineros*, and they are a highly respected, centralized branch of the federal government that conducts all law enforcement activities within the country. When I arrived in Chile, Urbano (husband of the sister-in-law of my brother-in-law — connections are very important in Chile, but that is another story) picked me up at the airport and took me on a tour of Santiago. Urbano's first piece of advice was that I should not try to bribe the *Carabineros*. Well I wasn't planning on it — but he was right, in that they are trustworthy and dependable. In our own system in the United States we have a multi-tiered framework of law-enforcement agencies at many levels — city police, county sheriffs, state highway patrols and several federal agencies with various jurisdictions. I have often wondered if the Chilean system, applied to the United States would avoid the confusion of overlapping jurisdictions. But perhaps in this case the difference in scale (a population of 260 million verses 15 million) and the corresponding structure would prove to be more bureaucratic



The view from Huerquehue National Park toward Lago Tinquilco and Volcán Villarrica

than the current system in the United States.

Although Chile is a centralized state, the primary focus is still the family. Family always comes first, before the state, before work, before friends. In everyday conversations, after the greetings, the topic usually migrates to the question of “how is your family?” On Saturday and Sunday afternoons I often see families strolling arm in arm along the streets talking, window-shopping and eating ice cream. This does not surprise me, but what does is how young children are given great latitude to roam. I can best express this through two examples. My last weekend in Pucón I invited professor Paty, her husband Carlos and their daughter Amapola over to the house for lunch. During lunch Amapola, who is six years old, never joined us at the kitchen table but rather played with the cats. She would crawl after the cats into all the nooks and crannies of the kitchen, including behind the wood-burning stove. Seeing this I became nervous because the stove was hot and Amapola was only focused on the cats, not where she was going. Neither her parents nor anyone else was concerned about the rampaging Amapola for they were engaged in a conversation, but to me watching this accident waiting to happen was tormenting. I asked Paty “do you think it is safe for Amapola to play by the stove?” And barely glancing in the opposite direction towards her daughter she said, “Oh, don’t worry she will be alright.” The second example comes from a recent visit to Puerto Montt, a nearby city of 110,000 people. I was walking along a very busy street and

right before me a family was crossing about mid-way in the block. The parents and one child easily navigated the obstacle and were headed into the furniture store, but two of their children were still trying to find a gap in the traffic to make a dash across the street. The kids were between six and ten years old and neither the parents nor the children that were left behind seemed to express the possibility of danger lurking at the moment. Eventually the kids got across the street and joined up with the rest of the family. In both cases I was surprised by the carefree attitude. Perhaps I have just been surrounded by our over-protective society in the United States and have not yet adapted to the differences between our cultures.

My transition between cultures is still in process and I expect will be noticeable for months to come. Just the transition between languages is still difficult for me. Usually, after spending a day at the computer writing segments of my newsletters, I have a hard time putting together a smooth sentence in Spanish. My housemates are probably wondering what is wrong with me as I piece together a simple sentence asking about their day at work. But I trust with time the transition between languages and cultures will become smoother. And probably what I think is odd or different about Chilean culture will become less dramatic and more customary during the next two years. But for now I don’t have many answers, just a lot of questions. I remind myself about that trait I often lack, and which has become a mantra for my own life — patience. □

FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

Institute of Current World Affairs

EUROPE/RUSSIA

Adam Smith Albion—Uzbekistan

A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University.

Gregory Feifer—Russia

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Whitney Mason—Turkey

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the *Vladivostok News* and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

Jean Benoît Nadeau—France

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

SOUTH ASIA

Shelly Renae Browning—Australia

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

sub-SAHARA

Marc Michaelson— Ethiopia

A program manager for Save the Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-build-
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ing in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting) availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his postgraduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research."

THE AMERICAS

Wendy Call—Mexico

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Paige Evans—Cuba

A playwright and former Literary Manager of the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City, Paige is looking at Cuba through the lens of its performing arts. With a History/Literature B.A. from Harvard, she has served as counselor at the Buckhorn Children's Center in Buckhorn, Kentucky (1983-84), as Arts Editor of the *International Courier* in Rome, Italy (1985-86), and as an adjunct professor teaching a course in Contemporary American Playwrights at New York University. She joined the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1990.

Peter Keller—Chile

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Susan Sterner—Brazil

A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women

Tyrone Turner—Brazil

A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced photo-essays on youth violence in New Orleans, genocide in Rwanda and mining in Indonesia. As an Institute Fellow he is photographing and writing about Brazilian youth from São Paulo in the industrial South to Recife and Salvador in the Northeast.

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