Through Gringa Eyes
An Exchange Student’s View of Chile

By
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Dedicated to:
My host family
For welcoming me into their world
to
My own family
For letting me go
and to
Rotary International
For making it all possible
A wise sister once told me that every story should have an adventure.
Lucky for me, life is an adventure, and this is my story.

Acknowledgements

Before I can write una sola palabra (a single word) about my experience in Chile and what it’s like to be an exchange student, I must pause and acknowledge the role of Rotary International in this stage of my life. If not for the passionate pitch of a Rotarian advocating Youth Exchange at my local high school, I may never have considered studying abroad. Special thanks go to Rotary District 6650 for sponsoring my exchange and Rotary District 4340 for hosting me.

At this point, I should also mention that Rotary doesn’t just choose random students to go off and fend for themselves in foreign countries. The process to become a Rotary exchange student is very rigorous including a long application, numerous essays, several rounds of interviews, and loads of red tape. In my very first interview, I met with no less than five Rotarians in the basement of a municipal building near my school. I had just come from a choir concert, and I hadn’t had time to change out of my show choir costume before my appointment. Let’s just say that I made quite a first impression in my red sequin dress and jazz shoes.

Once chosen, all Rotary exchange students are required to attend a series of overnight orientations. Over the course of these weekends, we were introduced to the inbounds, outbounds, and rebounds in our district.

- **Inbounds** - foreign students living in the U.S.A. for a year.
- **Outbounds** - American students preparing to leave for a foreign country.
- **Rebounds** - American students who have returned from abroad.

It was at these orientations that I first met Nicole and Jessie, two girls from Ohio that were also bound for Curicó, Chile. Long hours of roller skating, bowling, euchre tournaments, and late night pizza parties were only a foretaste of the many hours that we’d spend together over the next year. I also met Alé and Cony, two Chilean girls who were happy to share about their country. They tried to teach Nicole, Jessie, and I how to dance the cueca for the district talent show, but the Chilean national dance turned out to be
a little too complicated for us *gringas*, especially since it’s a partner dance and we didn’t have anyone to teach us the guys’ part.

Orientation weekends were a lot of fun, but we weren’t there just to have a good time and eat lots of good food. Although, the quantity and quality of the food warrants mentioning. A large portion of our days was devoted to learning about Rotary and about our host countries. We were given packets of information that we were expected to read before the next orientation session and an extensive list of supplementary reading.

Through these materials I learned a lot about Chile before ever setting foot in the country. I learned that the country is as long as the USA is wide and that it’s so skinny that there are only one hundred and fifty miles separating the ocean from the mountains at the widest point. Another bonus that comes from having such a long country, besides the gorgeous view, is the diverse range of environment. In the north, Chile is a desert, but as you descend through the twelve regions, you pass through green valleys and eventually arrive at the frozen glaciers of Patagonia.

I also thought it was interesting that even when I’m so far from home, I’ll still be in the same time zone. Well, for a while at least. When the time changes we’ll be two hours apart and there will be several weeks where the difference is only one hour because daylight’s savings doesn’t occur on the same date in both countries. I can only assume that this difference has something to do with the difference in seasons and climates. Because Chile and the USA are in different hemisphere, the seasons are flopped. When it’s summer in Ohio, it’ll be winter in Chile and vice versa. The idea of swimming in December could take some adjustment.

Besides the reading, Rotary also assigned us reports as homework so that we could educate ourselves and our fellow outbounds concerning our host countries. For example, my group had to research the Pinochet dictatorship so that we would understand the political tension that still exists in Chile between the supporters of the dictatorship and the supporters of the overthrown socialist party. We also needed to be aware of the alleged American involvement in the military coup that caused the death and torture of thousands of Chilean people. It amazed me that there could be so many sides to the same story. Everyone in Chile has an opinion about what happened, but Rotary advised us to keep our opinions to ourselves and not ask too many questions. Even after thirty years, it’s still a very sensitive issue.

One of the most important things that we learned during these orientations was the exchange student motto: “It’s not good. It’s not bad. It’s just different.” Our Rotarian counselors quoted this mantra at least once every orientation session in the hopes that we would learn not to pass judgment on our host country. No matter where we were going, things would be different; the food, the music, the holidays, the fashion, etc. We had to learn to expect and accept these differences as a natural part of our exchange student experience. Thus, we practiced.

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Las ganas de irme  
The will to go

I don’t know how it happened.
I never planned to study abroad. If you would have asked me as a freshman in high school, I would have told you in no uncertain terms that I didn’t want to go. It just wasn’t for me. I had never struggled for independence. I didn’t need to stretch my wings and I was perfectly content with my life in rural Ohio. I was happy there. Why should I go anywhere else?
For years I refused to even consider the possibilities. True, I studied Spanish and then dropped my only study hall to take French, but my love of language didn’t instill a desire to study abroad. I didn’t feel that wanderlust creeping in. The fact that I loved to study other cultures and devoured story after story of far off places and exotic customs didn’t mean that I had to go. I’d smile and shake my head whenever my teachers started twisting my arm, but they were adamant.
“You should study abroad. You should see the world.”
Finally, I agreed.
I don’t know what changed my mind, but one morning I listened to a speaker from Rotary International and I knew that I was going to study abroad. I filled out the initial application that day and then went home to tell my parents. I wish I could say that they were thrilled. They didn’t want me to go, didn’t understand why anyone would want to go, but they didn’t try to stop me. At least they were supportive. They even agreed to host a German exchange student during my senior year of high school so that I could witness “how the other half lived” and prepare myself to be a good exchange student. Hosting Christine gave me the opportunity to see how having an exchange student affected the host family and learn how to avoid a few of the difficulties that I might cause or encounter while abroad.
I think my parents secretly hoped that if they left me alone, I would lose my nerve and give up, but with each new step in the interview process, the various medical appointments, and the numerous snags involving diplomatic red tape, my resolve strengthened. I made all the arrangements myself, paid all the fees out of my own pocket, accepted the immunizations with little more than a grimace, and began to pack.

Thursday, August 14th
Seventy pounds.
I can’t tell you how many times I stepped onto the scale in my room. I’d grip the handle of my suitcase with both hands, take a deep breath, and shift the weight against my hip so that it rose several inches off the floor. I was only 5’2” and the suitcase maxed out the airline limit of 62.” I had to hold my breath so that the wavering needle could steady itself long enough for me to read the tiny numbers on the dial. Straining, I could just barely make out the spindly, black digits in the shadow of the bag. It wasn’t until later that I thought to recruit my sister and the aid of a flashlight. Over and over again, we packed and repacked my suitcase. I knew that I couldn’t go over the seventy pound limit, but I couldn’t bear to be much under either. It was so hard to decide what not to take when it came down to pounds. What would I need in the course of a year? What would I miss from home? What would make me smile again on a bad day?
With two seventy pound suitcases, a carry-on laptop computer and one very large duffel bag masquerading as a purse, you might think that I shouldn’t have had much trouble packing. Well, you might think that if you’ve never tried to fit your life into a suitcase. My bags were filled to bursting with tight bundles of clothes expertly rolled by my mother, shoes stuffed with socks so as not to waste space, pleasure books written in English, a well worn Bible, presents, candy, chai tea, and what I naively assumed to be a year’s supply of peanut butter.
My luggage weighed more than I did and I soon discovered that packing your life into a suitcase isn’t nearly as hard as trying to carry it through the airport single handedly. With no carts in sight and no one to rely on but myself, I was once again grateful that my parents hadn’t raised a dainty damsel in distress.
I ended up with the duffle strap slung around my neck and over my left shoulder while the computer strap hung from the right, and I half rolled, half dragged my two monster suitcases
along the hallways. It may not have been graceful and it certainly wasn’t comfortable, but somehow I managed to arrive in Santiago, Chile, luggage intact and none the worse for wear despite a long, sleepless night and a stomach full of butterflies.

Friday, August 15th

I didn’t know if I had ever been more tired. After twelve hours in several different airplanes and over eight hours of layovers, not to mention the initial ride to the airport, my brain was as clear as a kaleidoscope and I was in no mood to face the challenge to come. I hadn’t slept more than a wink in my cramped and drafty seat and the thought of facing a crowd of strangers in the hopes of recognizing my host family was overwhelming. I had received a family photo when I first contacted my hosts a few weeks ago, but even if I had remembered to print it out and bring it with me, the picture was so dark and fuzzy it wouldn’t have been much help.

Luckily, Rotary International requires all exchange students to wear blue blazers to the airport and all the incoming Chilean students were scheduled to arrive on the same day. You should have seen the crowd in the lobby. I walked out of the inspection area and stopped dead in my tracks. A plastic barrier was the only thing that separated me from a sea of people. I could hardly believe my eyes and had to take a deep breath before I could convince myself to move forward. Luckily, my host family had a better picture of me than I had of them and Teco, my host dad, recognized me among all the other international students. He called out my name, ducked under the barrier, and wrapped me in a huge hug. The rest of the family followed and began a round of introductions. Their smiles were a welcome sight as was the “Welcome to Chile, Shelly” sweatshirt they had embroidered especially for me. Before I knew it, my bags were in the trunk and I was on my way into Santiago with my new family.

The day passed in a blur. I did a lot of smiling and nodding as jet lag and sensory overload worked together to keep me dazed. The Spanish wasn’t a problem. I can understand pretty much everything when someone is talking directly to me, but I was too tired to keep up with all the conversations flowing around me. We ended up staying in Santiago for the day because Carolina, my host family’s real daughter, had to catch a flight to Ohio the same night. The fact that she wanted to study abroad is the reason that I was able to come to Chile in the first place. In Chile, the Rotary program operates a direct exchange. If a Chilean student goes abroad, their family must accept another child in his/her place.

We visited the mall in the morning and I was just awake enough to be amazed at the incredible number of ice cream stores that exist in Chile. I must have seen at least six different shops within the mall and many of the shoppers were carrying giant waffle cones. I don’t think it will take me long to adapt to this aspect of the Chilean culture. I love ice cream! I also noticed a lot of bold colors and what I would label tacky costume jewelry. It may take me a while to get used to the Chilean sense of fashion, although I admit that I love the scarves. When we went past the yarn store Carola (my host mom) promised to teach me how to knit so that I could make one of my own.

We had lunch with family friends and I had my first experience with the smoking phenomenon in South America. I have never in my life seen so many smokers in one place. You’d think puffing cigarettes after meals is part of their job description. Luckily, my host family does not smoke or I’m sure my allergies would mutiny long before June, but the majority of Chileans do. I was just grateful that we were eating on the patio; otherwise, the smoke would have been overwhelming. Lunch itself was very
interesting. We started out with *empanadas de pino*, savory pastries filled with beef, eggs, olives, onions, and spices. Watch out for the olives because they still have seeds inside. Then we moved on to the main course of grilled hamburgers topped with *palta*. *Palta* is a traditional Chilean condiment. It’s made of smashed avocados and salt and they eat it on almost everything. No kidding. Imagine green, mashed avocado on hamburgers, hot dogs, tacos, pasta, rice, bread, and lunchmeat sandwiches. I’m not a huge fan now, but I’ve been told that I’ll learn to love it before I leave. They served vanilla ice cream for dessert, but it tasted an awful lot like vanilla frosting, although a lot colder. Later in the afternoon, we stopped at the apartment of another family friend. They weren’t there, but we had been invited to use their home while we waited and I had never been happier to see a spare bedroom. We only had a few hours, but I fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. In the meantime, Carolina and her family finished her last minute packing and prepared for the final goodbye. That night I wore my welcome present to the airport where I was introduced to my Chilean grandparents and a lot of other relatives, but I can’t recall any of their names. Supposedly, they all live close by so I shouldn’t have trouble getting to know them when I’m more awake.

By the time we got back to Curicó, it was past midnight and I had been awake for nearly forty-eight hours. I hardly glanced at the neighborhood as I followed the Correas inside my new home. That could wait for tomorrow. First, I had to call home and let my family know that I had arrived safely. I hardly glanced at the neighborhood as I followed the Correas inside my new home. That could wait for tomorrow. First, I had to call home and let my family know that I had arrived safely. I didn’t feel particularly homesick, but the sound of their voices on the phone started the tears flowing. I’d like to blame it on a long day, but in all honesty, it may be a while before I can carry on a tear-free conversation.

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**Mi familia chilena**

*My Chilean Family*

**Sergio:**

Teco is my host dad. His real name is Sergio, but everyone uses the nickname. He works in town for the family fruit business, but he gets to come home for lunch every day. It’s very nice to see him. He likes to surprise me with hugs. In the summers, he plays polo with Matias and an uncle. I haven’t seen them yet, but I hear that we have twelve polo ponies.

**Carola:**

Carola is my host mom. She’s sweet and crafty. She paints, decorates pottery, knits, and embroiders in her free time. She’s the one who arranged for my “Welcome to Chile, Shelly” sweatshirt and she also had warm fuzzy peach towels embroidered with my name to make sure that I’d feel welcome. Later, she promises to teach me how to knit. We’ll see if she can find some latent artistic talent in these hands.

**Carolina:**

Carolina is seventeen and would be my host sister if she wasn’t currently in Ohio as a Rotary exchange student. We basically swapped places, except that she’s living with a family in New Philadelphia instead of with my own family. The Rotary clubs in Ohio don’t believe in direct exchanges because if a problem comes up in one family it may cause problems for the other family. Most of her friends and family members call her Caro.
Matias:

Matias is fifteen and a stereotypical teenager trying to establish his independence. He can be very nice and helpful when it suits him. However, when he wants something, he wants it done now and he wants it done his way. He also tried to teach me a few sketchy Spanish words on my very first day.

Agustin:

Agustin is twelve and the genius of the family. I brought brain teaser puzzles with me as gifts for the kids. They were the metal kind that makes you figure out how to remove a ring from a tangle of metal loops, strings, or sticks. Gundi, Agustin’s nickname, figured his out within the hour, but the other two boys didn’t have the patience. They gave up and looked in the instruction book before the end of the day. Gundi’s like a little ray of sunshine. He’s always smiling and quick to explain something if I have questions. He often points out helpful things that I hadn’t thought of and loves to hang around with me. I’m not just an older sister to be ignored.

Maximiliano:

Maxi is the baby, a little spoiled, but adorable. Sometimes, it’s hard to understand his Spanish because he likes to mumble like most little kids, but I’m trying my best. Yesterday, he sang me a Chilean Boy Scout song on our way home from Santiago.

Helga:

Helga is the family pet. She’s a little yippy wiener dog and we are not on the best of terms. Before coming to Chile, I thought myself an unreserved dog lover, but she has managed to prove me wrong, and I’ve only known her for two days.

That’s it for my immediate family, but I have to remind myself that Chilean families are much bigger. Carola has five siblings that help make up the Heinsohn clan and Teco has six siblings on his side of the family. Reunions are great big gatherings with all the uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents. One of the aunts has eleven kids. I don’t know how I’ll ever remember all their names, but they are the sweetest people and I felt right at home among them.

Saturday, August 16th

I woke up and found a stranger in the kitchen. It turns out that she’s one of two nanas that the Correas employ to help around the house. Norma lives with us Monday thru Friday and Maria Elena comes twice a week to help with the cleaning. It’s really strange not being expected to do things for myself. This morning, all I wanted was some cereal or a peanut butter sandwich for breakfast and the nana couldn’t believe that I intended to prepare it myself. It was rather awkward, but I managed to make my sandwich and then retreat to my room.

I spent the morning establishing myself in my new room. I was very aware that I was in Caro’s room and I didn’t want to change things too much, but I did want to feel at home in my new space. Luckily, I love the warm colors of the walls, the paintings, the bed spread, and
the fluffy pillows. However, I was a bit taken back by the piano at the foot of my bed and the lack of dressers. I ended up organizing my clothes onto three different shelves in the closet and I left my suitcase full of little gifts and candy on the floor under my good hanging clothes. Then I posted my pictures from home and a couple of Chilean maps on the wall. The room still felt a little strange, but it was mine, at least for the next nine months.

Later, Carola and I ran a few errands. I jogged around the country club while the boys were having their tennis lessons and then we went into town to buy my school uniform. Everyone wears uniforms in Chile, but since it was the middle of the school year the stores didn’t have everything I needed and Carola was not very happy. However, I did get sweat pants and two shirts for gym, several pairs of navy blue socks, tights, a sweater, and a school blazer. It was a fiasco. Six Chilean ladies swarmed around me at once trying to determine my size and talking a mile a minute in incomprehensible gibberish. I swear that by the time I get back, I will be very good at smiling and nodding. It’s not that I don’t understand the language. If the Chileans talk clearly and take turns speaking, I can understand pretty much everything. In fact, while I’m writing, I keep thinking of the Spanish words first and then stopping myself to write in English. I just can’t imagine coming here without having had four years of Spanish in high school, although I know it’s possible. Lyndsey from Canada hardly speaks a word and I had to translate for her and her host family at the airport.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t finish unpacking because so many people kept stopping by to say hello. To make matters worse, whenever I left my room to greet someone new, the *nanas* reorganized all my neat piles. Nearly all my new Chilean aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins live within a few blocks of our house. My cousin Scarlett is an exchange student from Australia who lives two houses away. She’s very nice and it was great to relax and speak English for a bit, although I really want to work on my Spanish while I’m here. Scarlett’s also a great source of information. I found out that between our two families, we have houses by the ocean, in the country, by the lake, and apartments in the city. Talk about a fun summer. The club where the boys play tennis has a huge pool too.

In the evening, I went out with some of Caro’s friends. We walked around the town. There’s a really cool rocky hill right in the middle of the city and several *plazas* with palm trees and fountains. The city itself seems kind of old and dirty. After our tour, we stopped in the park and ate little pastries. They must be really cheap because everywhere I looked people were licking ice cream cones and eating *chilenitos* or *alfajores*.

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**Mi nueva casa**

My new house

The house itself is very cute, with lots of bold colors and original art work. Carola likes to paint and her pottery is to die for. but I wonder what she’ll think of having a *gringa* daughter who’s artistically challenged. I can’t draw or paint to save my life, but at least I have a good eye to appreciate what she can do. I also have to giggle at all the throw pillows Chileans use in decoration. You can hardly find room to
sit on the couch for all the pillows and I pity Norma since she has to go through and fluff each and every one on a daily basis.

To enter the house, you have to come through the gate, either with your own key or by buzzing the nana to let you in. Once you’re past the fence, you walk through a tiny yard to the front door. Beware the sprinkler system, but make sure that you appreciate the warm shade of burnt orange on the walls and the ornate wooden door at the top of the steps. I love the style and colors! In fact, when I grow up, I want to have just as many bright, bold colors in my house.

Then you can either wait for the nana to let you in or dig out another key. The front door opens on a sitting room and dining area.

If you take a left, you can go past the kitchen, the girl’s bathroom, and the boy’s bathroom. My room is on your right and Matias’s bedroom is on the left.

Then you can take another left to enter the family room where you will find the TV, the computer, and the wood burning stove. I spend a lot of time near that stove.

From the family room, you can continue into the younger boys’ room or into the master bedroom.

The kitchen is attached to the patio which attaches to the back garden. You can also reach the garden through a sliding door in the living room.

Sunday, August 17th

This morning I decided to start checking my email before everyone else wakes up. This way I don’t disrupt any family plans and I have something to do with myself. It seems that 8:30, which I consider sleeping in, is still muy temprano (very early) for the Chileans. Unfortunately, the computer has a virus and doesn’t always work like I want it to. I’ve found that it’s much more efficient to write my emails in Word and then cut/paste them into my hotmail site in the sixty second window between crash times. I’ve been told that the server is cantankerous for everyone so it’s not just me who’s technologically challenged.

I can’t imagine what it would be like to be an exchange student without email. Computers may give me a headache, but I can still
write to my family and receive their replies on a regular basis. I can also keep track of my friends and send out bimonthly updates about my adventures in Chile. The only glitch to the system is that my grandparents don’t own or operate computers. I guess they’ll just have to wait for their letters the old fashioned way.

Since there are no *nanas* on Sundays, I had the house pretty much to myself and decided to go jogging at the tennis club before breakfast. I was back and showered before my family started to stir, but by 10:30 we were all dressed and I got to experience the Chilean phenomenon of being “on time” for church. We didn’t even leave the house until the bells started ringing the start of the service, but I guess that lateness is to be expected in Chile. We weren’t the last ones to arrive. I sat with my host family and tried to follow along, but I wasn’t Catholic, there weren’t any bulletins to provide guidance, and the echoing ceiling did nothing for my Spanish comprehension. I really liked the man in the green robes because he spoke slowly and clearly. I think he was the main priest. Unfortunately, he only presides over a small portion of the service and his associates don’t follow his example. The church itself was very old, but it still managed to retain its charm and character. Centuries of history can do that. Many introductions followed, but all the names and faces are a blur. I don’t think I can remember a single one.

Later, we had almuerzo (lunch) in the country so that I could meet more of my host family on Teco’s side. It reminded me a lot of the annual Thanksgiving gathering at my grandparents’ house in South Carolina. It was chaotic. There were people everywhere going in opposite directions and a passel of dogs and children were underfoot. I had a great time. My Chilean relatives speak Spanish very distinctly and I had no problem joining in the conversation.

We had a cook out on the patio with cheese empanadas, grilled pork chops, cold potatoes swimming in mayonnaise, green salad, and mixed fruit. Everything I tried was tasty although it may take me awhile to accustom myself to the new food combinations, especially the predominance of mayonnaise (And I thought American potato salad was bad!). I’m also going to have to get used to the smoking. It seems to be a cultural habit to have a cigarette after the meal.

Afterwards, the cousins gave me a tour of the vineyards, which looks a lot like grape stumps at the moment, and they tried to teach me about the local flora. The yellow flowering trees that line the paths are *aromeras*, pansies are known as *pensamientos* (little thoughts), and I fell in love with a cute flower called *oreja de oso* (bear ears) which I didn’t recognize. Next we stopped at the stables which hold a few little horses, but not Teco’s...
polo ponies. Everything is old and charming. Each tree, field, and building has its own distinct character. It would be fun writing a story about the lives of these places. Just think of all the years they’ve seen.

Tea time was a completely novel experience. They call it once and if you enjoy sugar highs, you would love having tea in Chile. Sugar seems to be infused in the majority of their desserts, and if the pastry itself isn’t sweet enough, the sugar can be encrusted as a messy, sticky shell of meringue or manjar caramel. My favorite part was the leche de platanos which basically involves cold milk, very ripe bananas, a dash of sugar, and a blender.

Over tea, we breached two of the most important questions for Chilean teenagers. “Do you or do you not have a boyfriend?” and “Are you happily going out?” Beware, the commonly accepted novio (boyfriend) vocabulary is reserved for engaged couples only. In Chile, a boyfriend is a pololo and to say “I am going out” the phrase is "estoy pololeando". I love saying it out loud. It makes me smile because it sounds so funny. Unfortunately, my answer is much more complicated. How do I explain to them that I was dating someone, broke up with him before coming to Chile, and yet still have feelings for him. Sigh. I think we’ll save talks of Mike for another time.

We returned home for dinner and since the nanas don’t work on Sunday, I got to try my hand in the kitchen. It wasn’t much, but Carola let me make the noodles while she went to the store for fresh bread. She also bought me chamomile tea and granola cereal for breakfast. I had mentioned earlier that I wasn’t a huge fan of the sugar crispies that the boys prefer. She is going out of her way to make me feel welcome and at home. I feel so blessed to have such a great host mom.

On the other hand, I’m beginning to see that Chileans may be even more obsessed with body image than Americans. I am amazed at how many nicknames revolve around a person’s physical appearance. Flaca and gorda are the most common, distinguishing between skinny and fat, but you also hear things like bajito and pelao which I would translate as shorty and baldy. Then today, Carola announced that the whole family should be as skinny as I am. She wants me to tell them what to eat and take them jogging with me whenever I go. I’m not sure how I’m going to get out of it, but if there’s a will, there’s a way.

One thing that I forgot to mention earlier about my cousin, Scarlett (Australia), is how we met. Within minutes of our introduction, she had pulled me into the bathroom and onto a scale. She needed to know how much I weighed so that she could compare and keep track. She’s really worried about how much weight she’s gained as an exchange student, but I honestly don’t see why. She’s a beautiful girl, but I guess she doesn’t measure up to the Chilean standards.

Monday, August 18th

Today was my first day of school at Lycée Jean Mermoz de l’Alliance Française. As part of an upper class Chilean family, I will be attending a private school in the community. The school is affiliated with a French organization so I will be able to continue studying French even as I work to perfect my Spanish. How cool is that!

The school day is really different than I imagined it would be. Before I left, I was telling everyone that I would only have to attend classes until lunch, but I was misinformed. School here begins at 8:30 and ends at 5:30, but the day isn’t as long as it seems. I have three classes in the morning with two fifteen minute recess periods. At 12:30, I have a two hour break for lunch. Then at 2:30, I return for two more classes and another fifteen minute recess.

I go through the entire day with the same group of kids in the same classroom. In Chile, the professors change rooms instead of
the students, but in a week’s time, we have a lot more subjects than
American students because the schedule changes every day. Accord-
ing to my classmates, these are the classes that I have to look forward to:

**History:** I actually have two different types of history because we learn about the history of Chile specifically and then the history of the world in general. This last one is the hardest class for me to understand because the professor is very soft spoken.

**Mathematics:** This class revolves around lots and lots and lots of worksheets, but they’re not too complicated. I’m actually much more advanced in math than my classmates, although the professor did teach me a tricky way to solve really hard equations with substitutions.

**Science:** I have physics, biology, and chemistry.

**PSU Castellano:** Imagine finding deeper meanings to poetry and novels in an AP English class, and then switch languages and try doing it again in Spanish. It’s really difficult and gives my brain a workout, but believe it or not, this is probably my favorite class.

**French:** My classmates have been studying French since the first grade so I’ll need to pick up my pace if I want to keep up. I also have to fight my American English accent that’s been adapting itself to Spanish and therefore butchers the French pronunciation in the eyes of my professor.

**English:** My easy A, but I think I’m going to drop this class since I’m rather advanced and it drives me crazy to watch them learning things incorrectly. I tried to offer a suggestion to the professor, but she was not pleased. However, they must be doing something right because the majority of Chileans can communicate in English if they have to.

**Philosophy:** I don’t know about this one yet. We only have one session a week and it’s on Wednesday.

**Physical Education:** Gym class actually requires effort in Chile. We started the first class by jogging over a mile and then spent an hour doing basketball drills which led to my only near-tear experience of the day. The teacher kept yelling at me for leaving my person unguarded, but I had yet to memorize the names of my classmates, especially the boys. She kept yelling out new names, but I didn’t understand who she meant. When I finally explained the situation, she was a lot more understanding.

It seems like a lot, but those who were worried that I’d burn myself out trying to compete out of my league, shouldn’t have bothered. I’m not even being graded for this semester. It’s nice not having to stress about finishing everything in perfect condition.

Some interesting notes about the school in general:

-Everyone wears a uniform and you shouldn’t confuse gym clothes and classroom clothes. I unknowingly made that mistake and was informed that my uniform was unacceptable. They let it go for today, but next time I will be sent home to change.

-Before class starts, we all line up in two lines outside the door. One line is for boys and the other is for girls. When the teacher arrives we can enter the classroom, but you’re not supposed to sit down. That’s another mistake I made. You have to wait until the teacher asks you to be seated.

-In America, our grade levels rise from first through twelfth, but in Chile, they count up through eight and then start over at one for the last four years. I’ve been place in 3ºB which means that I’m in section B of the junior class. It’s weird being a junior again since
I’ve already graduated from high school, but it didn’t make sense for me to join the senior class. They’ll be graduating in December and I’d have to start with a new group when classes resume in the Fall (March).

- The classroom itself is a square white room with a dry erase board, a small TV, battered desks that have seen better days, and little else besides the students and their stuff.

- There is no heat in the school building. Most students were their coats during class. Some even wear hats, scarves, and gloves.

- During recess, the students leave all their stuff in the classroom and go outside into the courtyard. After all the warnings about pickpockets, some of which came from Chileans, I received an awful lot of teasing when I tried to take my bag outside with me for recreo. Most kids buy candy or chips at the snack bar during this time.

- Chilean students waste a lot of time. On my first day of class, we spent two or three hours just talking, doodling, and playing games. They taught me a game similar to scattegories and another like hangman. Chilean students also enjoy text messaging each other about every two minutes. The principal actually had a meeting with my host mom after class, telling her how impressed he was that I actually participate!

If I haven’t described it yet, I also need to mention how warm the Chilean people are. I think I spend the majority of my day giving welcome hugs and kisses. Every person I meet gets un beso and asks me ¿Cómo Etai? The Chileans don’t bother to pronounce their ‘s’ for the typical ¿Cómo estás? (How are you). They also have a habit of asking the same question three or four times in different ways: ¿Cómo Etai? ¿Cómo estás? ¿Cómo has estado? ¿Cómo estuviste? The list goes on, but it all means pretty much the same thing.

My family called tonight for the first time. I’m sure we were all counting the minutes until 9pm. It was so nice to hear their voices again, although I did most of the talking. I can hardly believe that I talked on the phone for a whole hour. Better yet, all my chatter was happy news and no tears. I think that’s a good sign that I’m adjusting well. My only problem at this point is that my camera and computer haven’t learned to play nice. Teco says I need a 3-2 converter. Whatever that is.

Tuesday, August 19th

The second day of school and I’m already in the swing of things. I have to get up early if I want to beat Norma, the nana, to my breakfast. I’m being a little sneaky, but I also get a chance to check my email this way. Teco bought a new internet plan where it’s cheaper to connect between 8pm and 8am, taking advantage of the night hours when there’s less user congestion. I use my early morning time well. It’s also becoming second nature to automatically kiss the cheek of everyone I meet. In Chile, it would be impolite to not greet every single person in a room with a beso upon arrival and then again before you leave. Note to self: I’ll need to start saying goodbye about half an hour before I actually want to leave.

Biology and Physics were challenging because with a little straining, I could almost understand the concepts and follow what was going on. Castellano is another story. When I follow the book I follow the class, but the teacher likes to skip around and his babble about romantic themes went in one ear and out the other.

Today I started playing volleyball and I love it. Practice is only three times a week which is quite a change from the daily routine that I’m used to. Girls of all ages showed up for try outs, but the coach could only pick eight to be on the team that would travel to
Concepción, and I made the team. I was so excited. It took a bit of patience and confusion to overcome the language barrier and to understand the difference in rules and rotations, but I caught on eventually. To be honest, the team isn’t very good, but what they lack in talent they make up for in kindness.

We had lentil soup for dinner which was an experience. I have yet to decide whether or not I’m a fan. On the one hand, it’s warm and filling. On the other, it’s kind of slimy and gritty. The nenas also served us broccoli, but I couldn’t understand why they would steam it and then put it in the refrigerator to chill. I’ve never eaten steamed broccoli cold.

**Sopa de Lentejas**

*Lentil Soup*

2c lentils  
1 medium onion (minced)  
1 clove garlic  
3/4c shredded carrots  
1/3c rice  
1 cube chicken bouillon

- soak lentils overnight and strain the bad ones out  
- boil in 3” of water for 40min  
- sauté onion, garlic, and carrots  
- add sautéed veggies, rice, and chicken bouillon to lentils  
- simmer until rice is done

* The boys love to eat it with sliced bits of hotdog or sausage on top.

Wednesday, August 20th

Today I received permission to drop English class. I think I’ll use the extra time to write my philosophy assignment. We just watched “A Beautiful Mind” in class and we’re supposed to analyze the psychology in an essay which addresses the effects of genius and schizophrenia. This task, which would be difficult even in English, was balanced by the really easy math worksheets. I’ve also found that after missing the first half of the year, it’s difficult to connect the dots of Chilean history, but I like the professor’s Socratic Method and I’m trying to stick it out. In our free time, I taught my classmates how to say “Shame on you” or “Qué verguenza” with the appropriate finger motions and they amused themselves for quite a while. It’s times like these that remind me of the difference in our ages and my eighteen years feels ancient compared to their sixteen. I hate to say it, but sometimes they remind me a lot of the little kids I used to baby-sit for at church.

Only three girls showed up for volleyball practice so our team played with a bunch of little boys. They were mesmerized by the gringa and the game was accompanied by a lot of requests for me to “speak something in English.” I wonder how long it will take for the novelty factor to wear off. For the moment, I feel a lot like a circus animal on display.

After practice, I didn’t see anyone to pick me up so I jogged home, but no one answered the bell to let me in. I rang and waited, rang and waited. Finally, I went to an aunt’s house and had her call my host parents, but no luck. When I returned to the house, I met Teco coming home from work, Gundi who hadn’t bothered to answer the phone, and Carola and Scarlett who had been out looking for me. What a fiasco!

Carola asked me later if I’d be willing to share my bed with another girl this weekend when the Alianza Francesa in Curicó hosts a volleyball and basketball tournament. It seems that the visiting players board with local students. This would never happen in the United States. Naturally, I told Carola that I would, but I was a little skeptical. My bed is small to begin with. I stewed for several hours before I decided that it just wouldn’t work. Gathering my courage, I admitted that I just wasn’t comfortable sleeping back to back with a stranger. Boy was I relieved to learn that I sleep in a trundle bed! Carola pulled out the lower bunk to prove it.

Speaking of tough conversations, in a few days, I may have to talk to Carola about real juice. The Correa family would love Kool-Aid. Their juice is like sugar water with a little fruity flavor.
For dessert, they like to have Jell-o or fresh fruit. The fruit here is great. I had an orange.

Thursday, August 21st

I just figured out how to post my pictures on the internet. It’s a long and tedious process, but Teco says that he’s installing broadband and he’ll get a cable to hook my computer up too. Soon the world will get to see photos of my new home. It would have happened tonight, but Matias didn’t do his homework until the last minute and I had to cancel my download. I guess living with brothers will take some getting used to, especially since I have to adjust to three at once.

School was really boring. Que fome! I don’t know how I’m going to last through December when classes let out for summer, and then again through June when I go home. The students don’t do anything. In a seven hour day, we might, and I stress might, use three of them to learn something. For someone who thrives on curiosity and creativity, all this wasted time is suffocating. My classmates are great people and they’re unbelievable nice, but they’re so lazy. Alé was giving hair cuts today and I cringed as the general mullet fashion got even scragglier. Everyone else was busy painting during math, throwing paper wads in history, carving on the desks, and burning cute paper bears in the propane heater. In the meantime, the professors sat behind their desks and amused themselves.

I went walking with Carola, Tía Maca (my aunt Maca), and Scarlett after school. Scarlett is fast becoming a good friend. We are so alike in our views of life, despite the fact that she’s Mormon and I’m protestant. It’s also nice that we can both speak English on the rare occasions when we really need a sympathetic ear.

We tried a new recipe for dinner. Pastel de papas is like a cross between lasagna and mashed potatoes. I was an immediate fan, although the eggs were kind of slimy.

In the evening, I met my Rotary counselor. His name is Ernesto O’Ryan and I was already relaxing in my pajamas when he dropped in for a visit with his wife and teenage son. I could have groaned at the timing, but he was very nice about the whole embarrassing situation. He explained that there would be a Rotary meeting the following Wednesday and that I should start learning traditional Chilean songs and dances. On August 30th, all the international Rotary exchange students will be gathering for a weekend orientation program in the mountains of Guayacan.

Paste de Papas
Potato Pie

6 potatoes
Milk
Butter
1 large onion
1# hamburger
3 eggs (hardboiled and sliced)
1-2c tomato sauce
Salt to taste
Parmesan cheese

-Peel potatoes, boil until tender, mash with milk and butter.
-Brown hamburger and onion.
-Pour mixture into greased baking dish.
-Layer eggs on top.
-Cover with potatoes.
-Sprinkle with cheese.
-Bake until cheese is melted and golden.
Before I went to bed, Maxi taught me to play Ludo, a marble game that reminded me a lot of Wahoo or Aggravation. He’s cute, fun, and adorable, but he’s a tricky little cheater. I had to scold him for being trampozo several times before he realized that I wouldn’t let him get away with being sneaky. Then Matias announced that he wants to go on an exchange to Australia in January. I feel mean for thinking it, but I think I’d better start praying for his host family now.

Friday, August 22nd

I love Fridays! Not only am I done with school at 12:30, but we actually get to wear our own colorful clothes again. After only a week in uniform, I’ve decided that I’m definitely pro-choice in the school uniform debate.

I had to go into town this afternoon to buy kneepads, envelopes, stamps, and a calendar. Unfortunately, Carola had gone to the country to give painting lessons, and I was afraid to go all the way downtown by myself since I didn’t know exactly where I was going. I had been given directions over the phone, but I was afraid that I’d misunderstood the garbled Spanish and that I’d get hopelessly lost. Luckily, Noelle (Brazil) came over after lunch to help me navigate the public transportation system. Chilean colectivos are like taxis, but not quite, and I didn’t know how to find them, call them, or direct them.

Noelle and I walked around downtown Curicó, perusing a lot of little shops. One stop super centers like Wal-Mart don’t exist in abundance in Chile. However, they do have a plethora of shoe stores (several on each street). Unfortunately, I’m not a fan of their sense of shoe style. Even if I could find a pair that I liked, I’m sure that I’d break my neck within three minutes of walking out the door in those insane heels. When we had completed our meandering, we headed back to Noelle’s house for tea and met up with Scarlett and Pia. Noelle’s host sister, Pia, participated in an exchange with Germany last year. We laughed and talked over apple pie and hot chocolate made from scratch. By the way, they store milk here on the shelves instead of in the refrigerator. That’s weird I wonder what keeps it from spoiling.

Kuchen de Manzanas
Apple tart

**Crust:**
- 2c self-rising flour - (literally translated as flour with rising dust)
- 2 eggs
- ½ c sugar
- 2T butter

**Filling:**
- 6 peeled, shredded apples
- ½ c sugar
- cinnamon
- lemon juice (juiced from one lemon)

-Mix crust ingredients. Saving a bit for topping, press dough into greased spring form pan. Bake until golden.

-Mix filling ingredients in saucepan, boil until apples are coffee colored, pour over crust.

-Sprinkle reserved topping over filling. Bake until golden.

Scarlett and I took another colectivo back to her house to watch a movie before going to play Bingo with our host families. When Carola had described it earlier, I had imagined Bingo to be a small group meeting with friends of the Correa family and the new exchange students. Think again! The Estadio Español (The local
Country Club) was filled with people and the gaming lasted for three hours. I didn’t win a thing, but I did have real fruit juice again. They had fresh apple and fresh raspberry juice which was delicious except for the seeds. There were cute little rolls to nibble on too. I should have guessed. Chilean bread is fabulous.

I think Teco is amazed that I’m not a night owl. I was falling asleep in my chair at 10pm, but we stayed to saludarse (say hello and chat awhile) with the family friends. Then we dropped Matias and his friends off at the cinema because they wanted to wait an hour so that they could watch the early bird movie. I don’t know how you can call a screening after midnight an early bird, but I plan to be sleeping by the time it starts.

Sigh. The computer is on the fritz. I can’t access my email so the my family and friends are clueless as to what’s going on in my life. We can’t even use Word or turn off the system. I love computers!

Saturday, August 23rd

One of the things that I didn’t really comprehend before coming to Chile was the weather. Now that I’m in the southern hemisphere, the seasons are flopped. Logically, I understand that August is a winter month in Chile, but subconsciously, I still expect it to be hot and sunny. No wonder I feel so cold all the time. It doesn’t help that central heating is a rarity in Chile so I have to depend on a small wood stove and many layers to keep warm even inside the house. That’s why I began my Saturday with breakfast in bed. I just discovered that there’s a mattress heater under my sheets and the thought of toasty warm blankets was impossible to resist on such a frosty morning so I made myself a peanut butter and jelly on toast sandwich and crawled back under the covers. The jelly here is really thick and really sweet. What a surprise! Everything’s sweet in Chile.

Later, I went shopping at Bryc, the local supermarket, to buy yogurt for me and lettuce for Norma. While there, I took the time to poke around. Normal 100% orange juice doesn’t seem to exist in Chile. Oh well, I guess I’ll just have to console myself with the mountains of fresh fruits.

We had our first volleyball competition today. The team took a minibus to Talca and I saw more of the darker side of Chile. Poor people living in shack villages lined the highway interspersed with all the vineyards. The extreme divide between the upper and lower social classes in Chile baffles me. There is no middle ground. My family, like all Chilean families who can participate in Rotary belong to the upper class. The lower class consists of the nanas and the farm/factory workers. To the Chileans, this system seems normal, but for a gringa, it almost feels like I’ve stumbled across a remnant of a medieval feudal system.

The bus stopped at a gas station for lunch. I had already eaten, but although the steamed vegetables Norma had made me were really tasty, they were not very filling and I was more than happy to accept the pineapple yogurt that Coach Ricardo bought me. Americans are really missing out on this flavor.

We tried to warm up for the game, but it was so cold in the massive stadium that we ended up playing with our goose bumps. I played in one out of three games and it was interesting trying to learn a new sport with hand signals and unintelligible shouting. I say new because the game is different in Chile. Each play gets a point no matter who serves the ball. They also change positions on the court all the time. They juggle tallness in the front row just like home, but they also switch in the back. The girls are really nice and explained the new rules with lots of smiles. Afterwards, we went out for ice cream. Of all the places in Chile, we ended up in a McDonald’s. I had to laugh and think of Dad. I thought ordering ice cream would be easy, but Chilean McDonald’s are much more specialized. I had at least three different choices to make while the entire world chattered in the background. One thing for Chileans, they really like their sweets and they are cheap. I got a McFlurry
look-alike with *manjar* (Chilean caramel) and chocolate cookie pieces for under a dollar.

When I got home, I just had time for a quick shower before heading over to an aunt’s house for a birthday party. Then I went out with some of Caro’s old friends to another party. I didn’t even know the birthday girl, but everyone was very nice to the *gringa*. I came home around 1am while the rest went off to crash a *discotec*. One of these weekends, I’m going to have to tolerate the smoke and go along too, but not tonight. Tonight I sleep.

**Sunday, August 24th**

I finally figured out how to load photos on the internet complete with captions. Now if anyone wants to see my first view of Chile, they can follow these easy steps:

- go to webshots.com
- click on community
- search for member “micaelainChile”
- confirm “micaelainChile”
- enjoy the photos complete with captions

I couldn’t believe how complicated it was to set up. I scanned photos for several hours and it took a lot of hard work and determination, but I think that the result is worth it. More pictures are sure to follow, but not for a while. I want to immerse myself in the Chilean life before I step back to capture it on film.

The rest of the morning was spent getting Agustin ready for his week long school ski trip. Because of the delay, we attended 12:30 mass instead of the 10:30 and had to go to the “earthquake” church at the center of town. This church is both new and old. In 1985, an earthquake shook the city and destroyed a lot of the buildings. The original outer shell remains, but the inside is beautiful hard wood with a large cross as the focal point. I don’t take communion with the rest because it’s considered a sacrilege against the Catholic Church for a non-Catholic girl to participate in the Eucharist.

However, I don’t stand out because all those who didn’t meet with the priest for confession can’t partake of the “*cuerpo y sangre*” either. The seats are long wooden benches and there is no heat. Many church members participate in reading scriptures and announcements, but I can only understand the priest. He speaks clearly and logically.

Maxi was driving me up the walls with his behavior during the service. In fact, I may rethink my desire to have children. He was climbing head over heels across the pews, pushing over and between people, talking, and coughing in my direction. I’d have given myself a cootie shot if I thought it would help. Another little girl was up wandering around the pulpit. I had to smile, remembering all of Mom’s stories about my antics in church when we were called up front for the kids’ sermon. At least this little girl kept her dress down.

We had lunch at the home of Carola’s best friend, Pancha. It was a huge house that also served as a pottery shop. I saw several pieces that I’d love to get Mom for Christmas. The colors are perfect for the kitchen and there are even some with roosters. We ate around 3pm and then I helped Pancha’s daughters by starring in a home movie for philosophy class. The girls were smart and didn’t tell me when they started taping the casual conversation of an exchange student so I didn’t even have to worry about messing up or being nervous. By the time I knew what was happening, the movie had already been filmed.

I had to wear my coat all day today. It’s so cold here. I miss 90 August weather.
Monday, August 25th

Trying to make my own orange juice in the blender resulted in a big, pulpy mess. What a disaster! Luckily, I spotted an orange juicer in the cupboard while Norma was preparing Teco’s breakfast. Better luck tomorrow.

The sun came out today and it was gorgeous. I actually stripped down to a long sleeve t-shirt for gym class, but inside the house, it’s still really cold. I had to email my mother and tell her not to worry about me in the cold Chilean temperatures. At first, I was freezing, but I’m handling it okay now. I think I finally mastered the electric blanket heater in my bed and Carola gave me some sheer shirts to wear under my uniform. They’re almost like black panty hose and I hope they help. Carola also suggested wearing tights under my pants and I already wear my coat all day and a neck warmer and gloves. Another oddball habit that amuses the Chileans is that I’ve been drinking hot water throughout the day. They can’t imagine how I can drink it plain without sugar or something.

Well, that’s my strangeness for the day, but I have to take a minute to describe an oddity that I’ve encountered in the Chilean culture. They don’t have Kleenex. If you want to blow your nose in Chile, you have to go to the restroom and use toilet paper. It doesn’t seem like a big deal, but my nose misses the softness and I miss the convenience of a tissue box. As it is, I have to stop in the bathroom before class to pull off a long wad of toilet paper that I can then tear into chunks and fold into my pocket. The worst part is that most Chilean public bathrooms don’t come equipped with toilet paper. I’ve been advised to carry a roll with me at all times, especially when I’m traveling.

Maxi made me a macaroni bracelet in art class and plans to make me a matching necklace tomorrow. After school, Carola and I ran the necessary errands to register myself with the Chilean police so that my student visa would remain valid. All exchange students have to register with the police of their host country. Afterwards, we bought yarn for my first scarf. I chose blue and apricot as my colors. My artistic endeavors are about to start too.

Tuesday, August 26th

The orange juice was a grand success, but I was amazed at how little juice you get from the fruit. There’s only half a glass in two whole oranges. What a waste of fruit!

We experimented with the force of friction in physics today. I remember doing the exact same experiment with Mrs. Turner two years ago. Of course, it only took us half an hour to complete what the Chileans students couldn’t finish after an hour and a half. If only Chico and Jose Thomas would listen to me. They just assume that the gringa doesn’t know anything. We’ll see how long it takes them to learn that I’m an asset to their group.

Carola and I went out after lunch to get my Chilean ID and to find a costume for the Rotary orientation party. It was the beginning of an awful afternoon. I was already tired because I didn’t sleep well last night or the night before. In fact, I haven’t slept well since I arrived in Chile. Then I found out that I had to take another awful picture. Yesterday, I had posed for the police right after gym class and today I was wearing sweats and a frizzy braid for volleyball practice. Sigh. So much for being beautiful!

Next, we visited a costume shop owned by another of Carola’s friends. I had already decided to be a cute little girl at a pajama party complete with freckles and pigtails, but Carola had other ideas. Now I’m all set to be a witch and I don’t know which option I’ll go with since my personal preferences are in conflict with my desire to protect my host mom’s feelings.

Now Carola is terribly afraid that she offended me and that I want to leave. I tried my best not to burst into tears in the car today, but to no avail. I couldn’t help it. I’ll have to make sure that she notices my contentedness over the next few days. She’s done so much for me already. She just doesn’t understand that I occasionally need to cry and release my pent up emotions for no apparent reason.
The one thing that I’ll admit bothers me about Chile, besides the inevitable infusion of sugar, is their obsession with weight. Everyone is either fat or skinny with no comfortable middle ground. They fuss every day about how little I eat and then turn to Scarlett who eats like any normal teen and start stressing new diets and exercise plans. I don’t understand.

Volleyball practice was the highlight of my evening. The coach was working one on one with my serves and I’m amazed at how much better they are. We also did a few drills where we had to spike with our left hand instead of the right. I really like his coaching style. He does yell a lot, but I can’t understand it anyway so it doesn’t bother me a bit. :-) You should see how dirty my hands are after practice. I was shocked.

My first knitting lesson was a success. I think. I worked for an hour, completed two rows without mistakes, and made my host family laugh with the power of my intense concentration. With Carola’s help and the occasional rescue, my scarf should be beautiful when finished, but even with its many imperfections, I know that I’ll wear it with pride.

Wednesday, August 27th

I had a free period right before lunch while my classmates studied English and had a chance to do a little exploring. Rather than make two trips to the house to fetch Maxi, I decided to wait the extra fifty minutes in the library. First, I took advantage of all the French magazines to start researching my presentation on le clonage (cloning) and then I moved on to the cooking magazines. The dishes looked amazing, but the presentation, lavishly expensive ingredients, and obscure culinary vocabulary were out of my league. I came back in the afternoon when I’d finished my math test. In Chile, if you finish a test early, you can just walk out. The test wasn’t too bad except for a few indiscernible word problems, and perused the shelves for a bit of Spanish pleasure reading. I didn’t get anything today, but sometime soon I’m looking forward to accompanying Jim Hawkins on his voyage to La Isla de Tesoro.

I stayed after school for volleyball practice and ended up being the only girl. An older boy from 3ºA was present as well as six sixth graders. I jogged a bit and then spent an hour helping to coach. I’m amazed at the talent the little guys have. They’re better than a lot of the girls on the actual team.

We ended early and I walked home. Unfortunately, Carola had gone to the supermarket without her cell phone and I was at a loss at how to let her know that I didn’t need picked up. Eventually, I changed for the Rotary meeting and walked back to the school to wait for Carola, but everyone wanted to give me a ride home. At 7pm, an aunt insisted that I go home with her. Now I know that there is a special booth for leaving messages at the front of the school.

The Chilean soap opera cracks me up. Not Machos itself. I can’t imagine what they see in the show beyond a lot of tears, rage, scandal, sex, and bad acting, but the Chileans are fascinated with it. The one thing it has going for it is good looking actors and actresses. Everyone wants to know who’s the most mina (hottest) and the show has become an obsession. Two of Caro’s friends stopped by last night to chat, but at 8pm they automatically got up and Carola turned on Machos. They didn’t even have to ask.

Meanwhile, I’m impressing myself with my knitting skills. I worked a bit during the show and didn’t need rescuing once. However, I’m still painfully slow and have to supply intense concentration. It’ll be a while before I can talk to friends or enjoy a TV show like Carola does while I work the needles.

I rode to the Rotary meeting with Scarlett and her host dad. Once again, she was lamenting about how her old clothes don’t fit her anymore. We were running late, but since that’s the norm in Chile it wasn’t a problem. The meeting officially started at 9pm, but the first hour was reserved for mingling, chatting, appetizers, and drinks. We ended up sitting down around 10pm for dinner and enjoyed the fresh bread and empanadas de pino. The president got
up and welcomed the exchange students to Curicó and then invited the staff to bring on the main course: escalopas and French fries. For a girl who prefers to avoid fried foods, I was out of luck. *Escalopos* are another Chilean specialty where they take a really thin piece of beef or ham, wrap it in cheese, dip it in egg and bread crumbs, and then fry it crispy. Luckily, they served a fabulous dessert of fresh fruit and ice cream. It was so good that I didn’t even mind that it appeared at ten minutes till midnight. During the meal, they had one of the Rotarians stand up and sing for us. He had an amazing opera style tenor voice. The rest of the meeting was kind of a blur because it was past my bed time.

Thursday, August 28th

Bum Day! I slept in an extra half hour and then roused myself six minutes before the TV alarm. It’s so weird not having an actual clock, but I’m getting used to waking up with the Chilean newscasters speaking to me in Spanish amid the static. Part of me yearned to stay in bed, but my email time is too important to pass up for a little thing like sleep, especially since I never know when the computer will choose to cooperate.

I didn’t have class until 10am because the professor decided not to show up. In fact, I only had two classes today what with the free period in the morning and a history test in the afternoon that I couldn’t take since I hadn’t learned the majority of the material. I spent most of the time in the school library. It’s my haven, warm and cozy. I sat myself on the floor, leaned against the window, enjoyed the warmth of the sun on my back, returned a few quizzical stares with smiles, and lost myself in *The Negotiator* which I had brought with me from home. The familiar storyline and the English vocabulary were soothing to my soul and my exhausted brain cells. Then I discovered the computer lab and spent a good hour writing emails to my friends and family at home. I also introduced Jelly Bellies to my classmates. They were a big hit except for one suspicious white slotchy bean. If I had to guess, I’d say that buttered popcorn is a universal flop.

When Maxi and I came home for lunch, I was so tired that I opted for a nap instead of finding something productive to do. I had just settled in when Norma begged *permiso* and came in to ready my lunch. For the first time since I arrived in Chile, Carola and Teco didn’t come home for lunch so the *nana* brought individual trays to our rooms. Today I had *panqueques de acelga* with a banana and hot chocolate while I watched the Gargoyles fighting the bad guys of Manhattan in Spanish. It’s so neat to see the cartoons that I used to watch as a kid, playing like new in South America. It’s also nice because I already know what’s happening which helps with the more obscure vocabulary. As for lunch, it was weird not following the traditional pattern. In general Chilean meal times work like this:

* **Breakfast** is made by the *nanas* and served before school or work. Teco and Carola like coffee with toast and the boys eat milk and cereal or just plain milk. I wake up a little early to beat my *nana* to the kitchen, make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and check my emails.

* **Everyone comes home to eat lunch together around 1:30.** The schools give a two hour break and the parents return for two or three hours before going back to work. This is the main meal of the day. It generally starts with some kind of soup, followed by the main course, a salad course, and dessert. The *ensalada* is interesting because the vegetables are served cold, even if they’re cooked. The boys are a big fan of lettuce which they drench in lemon juice, olive oil, and salt. Just beware passing the salt shaker. In Chile, it’s considered bad luck to take the salt from a person’s hand. You have to set it down on the table so that the other person can pick it up for themselves.
After school (around 6pm), they serve once which is like the British practice of tea time. It usually involves milk or juice, bread, cereal, pastries, and/or yogurt.

Normal dinner is served at 9pm or 10pm in the evening. Formal dinners are even later, but I’ve been eating with my little brothers at 8pm. Carola and I have a suspicion that I’m having trouble sleeping because I’m not used to eating so late. Honestly, I’m also hiding. I’m getting tired of them commenting on how little or how much I eat at every single meal. I know the comments are just part of the culture, but it’ll take a little adjustment.

The kids at school also buy snacks almost every recess and we have three. Sugar high should be a common phenomenon in Chileans.

After I finished jogging and received my first Chilean cat calls from the rugby team, I joined Carola and Pancha to watch Maxi’s tennis practice. The little kids are really quite good and I felt ashamed of my own clumsy trial and secretly hoped that they’d never ask me to play. Maxi was tickled pink that I came to watch him and I made a mental note to make it a habit. Then I spent most of the afternoon watching his tongue switch from pink to blue as he sucked on a sucker. I swear he had me check the color between every other lick to make sure that the blue had stuck. Boys!

It looks like Matias is bound for New Zealand in January. He’s going with me to meet the other exchange students this weekend, but there are mixed feelings. I can’t decide whether I want to suggest caution against his youth and immaturity or if I should rejoice that he’ll be leaving and I’ll get to share the house with another exchange student. Exchange students do make the best of friends.

The nanas made apple strudel and another cake for tea tomorrow. Carola thought it would be a good idea if I invited some of my exchange student friends and some of Caro’s old friends and had a get together. Then Carola flipped through my recipes from home and was intrigued by the idea of no-bake cookies. I had to make a run to Bryc for oats and whipped up a quick batch. Peanut butter isn’t a staple in Chile like it is in the US, but mixed with chocolate, sugar, butter, and oats, my cookies were deemed muy rica (delicious). They were a success, but I guess my opinion of good cookie size is a little big in Chile. Oh well, I really enjoyed mine.

Minor fiasco: I had given Carola all my important papers to make copies and she came to me asking to see them. Talk about panic! My passport, visa, insurance... and she swore that she had left them with me. I began a frantic search of my bags and my room. Luckily, I was right to begin with and she found the documents where she had left them. Whew!

No-Bake Cookies
Galletas sin horno

2 c sugar
½ c butter
½ t salt
2T cocoa
½ c milk
½ c peanut butter
1t vanilla
3 c oats

* In saucepan, combine first five ingredients, boil and stir 1 minute.
* Remove pan from heat, add peanut butter and vanilla, and mix well
* Stir in oats
* Drop mixture by spoonfuls onto wax paper and allow to set
Friday, August 29th

Another fun Friday and my two week anniversary have passed. While my classmates took a Spanish test, I played with substitution in the library. I can’t help but immerse myself in math class. They may not be as advanced as American students, but I’m learning new little tricks every day. I also passed a milestone in French. The teacher started quizzing me just like I was a normal student. I have to stretch my mental muscles to keep up, but I’m ready to face the challenge.

Tea time was an interesting cross cultural collision of language barriers. Noelle (Brazil), Pancha (Chile), and Jimena (Chile) only spoke Spanish, Jessie (Ohio) and Lyndsey (Canada) only spoke English, and Scarlett (Australia), Pia (Chile), Nicole (Ohio), and I were in the middle. It was a lot of fun and I discovered the Chilean version of grilled cheese. They toast the bread in the oven using a typical Chilean cheese that seems similar to Swiss cheese, but a little milder and without the holes.

Buvi, my Chilean grandmother, came to visit and brought me a welcome present: a half pound chocolate almond bar. Yummy, but enormous! She was adamant that I had to come visit her home and started planning a fishing trip on the spot. She seems as warm and sweet as her gift.

I actually watched half of Machos with my dinner tonight. I’m trying to fit in with the culture and it was one of the better episodes. There was only one wedding, one funeral, and one emotional break down. However, the emotional Spanish was still out of my reach. My brain is fuzzy and I’m ready for bed.

Saturday, August 30th

Rotary Trip #1

I set the TV for a 6:46 wake up call so that I would have plenty of time to meet the bus at Bryc. I had forgotten about typical Chilean punctuality and had to wait forty-five minutes in the rain for Ernesto to arrive with the bus. The students from Talca were already on board and then we picked up the northerners in Santiago. All in all, there were thirty-seven of us exchange students and our Rotary advisors to make the trip to Guayacan, a hostel situated in the foothills of the Andes. The bus ride was phenomenal. All the roads are narrow and winding, following the curves of the mountains. Small rivers flowed along below us or cascaded down the rocks at our side. Cactus and a brilliant orange wildflower called Dedal de Oro dotted the view. At one point we had to hold our collective breaths as the bus squeezed though a tiny one way bridge. Finally we reached a pass where the pristine snow caps of the Andes were visible between the green peaks. Gorgeous!

The day began with a normal orientation schedule of rule reading and introductions of all the important people, but they more than made up for the dullness when they announced the year-long activity schedule. We get to travel to the Southern Lake Region and North to Antofagasta as well as weekend trips to the capital of Santiago and Viña del Mar, a beachside resort town. We also have the option (although it will cost a pretty penny) to fly out to Easter Island to see the ruins and/or go down to Punto Arenas where we can see the only native penguins in South America and the glaciers. I can’t believe all the opportunities.

There are only six countries represented in Chile. The majority of students are from Belgium and the US, but Australia, Brazil, Germany, and Canada also sent a few delegates. The first meeting was translated in English and Castellano (Spanish) with threats that this was the last time. I’m rather skeptical. By the evening, they
weren’t even trying to talk to us in Spanish. I spent a lot of our
down time in Nicole’s room with
new friends from Texas,
Oklahoma, Belgium, New Jersey,
and Canada. I can’t remember
any of their names at the moment,
but they all had great smiling
faces.

I also have to mention the
food because it cracks me up. I
think Rotary believes that all exchange students are secretly dying
doing of starvation and they’re devoted to fixing the problem. For
example, on Saturday, we boarded the bus after breakfast and were
given ham and cheese
sandwiches with
pineapple juice to eat
during the trip. Upon
arrival, they gave us
empanadas de pino
that were the size of
two well stacked
cheeseburgers side by
side. Two hours later
we had lunch of panqueques (tortillas layered with peas, corn, and
mayonnaise which we pretended to eat for the pictures), half a
chicken, hot veggies, fried potatoes, and topped off with ice cream
(which once again tasted like
vanilla icing). They supplied a
coffee break with cookies and
then a few hours later we sat
down for dinner. This time we
had tuna salad on artichoke
hearts followed by rice, roast,
and pineapple. It also makes me
laugh that they have several dishes for each course. It would be a
social disaster to put all the food on one plate. Believe me. I did it
a few days ago when we were scavenging and my host family was
shocked. We also had fresh bread with each meal and finished the
night with gift mugs full of candy and potato chips. It’s sad to see
how much food they throw away at every meal. I doubt the lower
classes are so lucky.

The costume party
was a lot more fun than I
imagined. Since Carola
had arranged for my
costume, I was dressed
to the tee as a cute little
witch. I stress cute
because I didn’t have
warts or a funky nose,
and I made sure that
everyone knew I was a
good witch not a bad witch.

Other costumes included a Chilean
cowboy (huaso), a cow, a doll, a cross
dresser, a Santa Claus, a hippie, a clown, a
mummy (last minute toilet paper), and
many more.

We had
to walk the
runway for the
camera so that
the Rotary can
make us a
memory tape of
our activities.

Unfortunately, the music stopped as I
made my turn down the runway and I
felt pretty silly trying to continue my
dance in silence. We danced very loudly
until 1am and then the boys drove off to
another hostel for the night.
Sunday, August 31st

What a night! They sent us to bed at 1am which was fine because we were all exhausted. Unfortunately, I ended up in a room with two Chilean rebounds who were smashed on margaritas and pisco (a very strong Chilean liquor) and an American party girl who was fitting right in. It was my first encounter with completely smashed drunken conversation: loud and very random in topic.

Luckily, the day improved from there. Despite being exhausted, I still woke up at 7am. I climbed down off my bunk and tried to nap in the salon which was covered in big comfy pillows fluffed daily by the hostel staff, but sleep was evasive. One of the maids even offered to bring me a blanket, another example of the warm nature of the Chilean people. I ended up taking a walk and snapping some photos of the pristine peaks before breakfast. The halls were still dark and empty when I returned at 9am.

We spent the day, probably the most gorgeous day yet in Chile, divided into five international teams. We competed in cheerleading, passing eggs, blindfolded obstacle courses, and scavenger hunts all morning. My team was uncontestedly in last place for most of the events, but somehow we ended up in second place.

For lunch, we had steaks that Dad would have appreciated and scrumptious mashed potatoes. Taylor (Texas) took several pounds of leftover meat and made a monster sandwich on a dare. I don’t know how he got it all in his mouth. Later, everyone who had lost something over the weekend had to perform a penance to get it back. Scarlett had to hop like a kangaroo, Jessie made it half way through “I’m a little tea pot,” and many others had to dance.

We turned in our passports and visas muy rapida because it was time to return home. Then we waited in the foyer with packed bags for an hour and a half. Even the buses in Chile display typical Chilean punctuality.
3¢ a minute so I don’t have to worry about my conversation costing a fortune.

Pancha came over for the phone call and brought *chilenitos* for me to try and for the rest to share. She’s really nice, and her friendship is growing on me. These sweet cookies/crackers filled with *manjar* and covered in meringue must take awhile to get used to. Luckily, I grabbed a napkin because the sugar coating crumbled as I munched. I washed my sticky fingers and left the sticky napkin in the trash, but I didn’t count on Maxi. He came out and tattled that I hadn’t eaten every crumb of my meringue. Oops. I have to make a point of assuring them that I really did like it now.

**Tuesday, September 2**

The class advising session could be boiled down to one question. “Who is going on the senior trip to France in March?” My classmates are really excited. Since the Alianza Francesa is affiliated with France, the senior class always begins their final year with an extensive field trip in Europe. I’ve been invited to go along too, but I think I’ll pass and spend my last weeks of summer vacation in Chile. After all, I already spent a lot of money on my plane ticket to Chile. I don’t need to be buying another international ticket so soon.

The rest of my day at school totaled out with one class: Physics. This time I just stopped the boys, Chico and Jose Tomás, and showed them what to do. That got their attention and they at least stopped using the calculator every time they wanted to convert cm to km. Then I had a test in Biology, English class, and a no-show Castellano teacher. Unfortunately, I had to walk back to the school before they informed me that class was cancelled. I spent the afternoon knitting, taking more pictures of Curicó, and organizing the photos on the computer. Naturally, the program still doesn’t work on the Correa computer.

In my wanderings, I discovered that Curicó is actually a rather large city with a huge hill growing right in the center. A lot of people live here, 200,000 people *mas o menos* (more or less).

Pastelerías (shops that sell little cakes and ice cream) are very common as well as shoe stores. I can’t say that I understand their fashion sense, but that’s ok. I had to go to different stores for envelopes, blue pants, calendars, yarn, and books. It’s a hodgepodge in the center with no Wal-Mart competitors. The old saying about the diamond in the rough is definitely true here. The streets are dirty with trash, graffiti colors the walls, and fences block most of the houses and gardens from view. However, experience has taught me that appearances can be deceiving and that the insides of these homes are often beautiful and welcoming. It’s very common for people to drop in and visit at anytime during the day.

After volleyball, I hurried home to eat dinner before heading out to my first *cuesa* lesson. All the new exchange students are taking lessons so that we can participate in the Sept 18th holiday activities: dancing, rodeos, *asados*, kites, Chilean wine and *pisco*, live music, etc. The *cuesa* has been described to me with two different analogies. In the first, the male dancer represents a *huaso*, a Chilean cowboy, who is courting his sweetheart. The second version is much more humorous. The guy represents a rooster and the girl his hen. Both versions make use of the colorful Chilean scarves known as *pañuelas*. These scarves help create a rural image of plumage and/or lassos that compliment the analogies.

Our lesson lasted for an hour and a half, and by the end, we were culturally tired, hot, and sweaty. Unfortunately, the girls outranked the guys 7:2 so we had to work out some creative partner swapping. I was lucky enough to be paired with the male instructor and I caught on so quickly that he taught me three different *paseos*. It was a lot of fun. The girl’s part is easy and dancing with the instructor is great because he plays with the steps as we go. He does something different each time, and I just have to
follow along. I felt like we had stepped out of a tap dance movie where the two pros try to prove the better dancer by playing copycat. It was great. I also danced with Walter and Nicolas (the Belgians). I received many compliments, which brightened my day, but my eyes were still starting to droop. I definitely had my exercise today.

I opened up my humungous chocolate bar to have a taste and it’s really good. They don’t have Carezza in the US and we are missing out. Chocolate cream filling with a hint of almond….. Yum!

Wednesday, September 3rd

I got my philosophy essay back today and earned my first 7. In Chile, assignments aren’t graded A-F, but rather 1-7 with 1 being the worst and 7 the best. Hurray! I guess all that hard work paid off. The teacher also enjoyed rubbing it in because the gringa was the only one to get a perfect score. I have a sneaking suspicion that he may have inflated the grade a bit just to rile my classmates so that they’ll try harder next time.

I had to undo half of my scarf today because of a goof. You’d think I could count to two easily enough, but a pesky three got in the way. Oh well, the more I practice, the better I get. Listening to my “Quest for Camelot” CD in my room is a great relaxer while I keep my fingers busy with my needles. Hopefully, Mom sends me my copy of Robin’s Daughter Prologue soon because I’m itching to write in all this unexpected and sporadic free time.

The pictures from Santiago and Guayacon are finally loaded on the web. Over two hours of work went into that download. I had the urge to throw that computer out the window as the internet crashed four times, but the result is worth it. Hopefully everyone will appreciate the effort.

Thursday, September 4th

My first experience with “my brain is too overwhelmed to function” syndrome, I had Castellano PSU (AP material) with some extreme vocab. Luckily, the professor is really nice and my classmates were a lot of help, but my dictionary still got a good work out. On the bright side, when we finished the vocabulary section, we moved on to the logical thinking/reading comprehension sections and my metaphorical light bulb was burning brightly.

Unfortunately, after all that hard work, I still had not one, but two history classes. Sigh. I actually stayed after class to tell the teacher that I can’t understand a word he says. However, speaking one on one didn’t help much. I think that he’s going to prepare some written notes over break that should improve my understanding. I just hope his handwriting will be more discernable than his voice. At least I won’t be learning any less. Math class was funny. I had to bite back a laugh as they learned simple algebra for the first time. I did the examples right along with the teacher. Thanks to Mr. Locke, I already have five years of experience.

All that mental straining wiped me out and I actually tried to nap after school. Giving myself the benefit of the doubt, I’d say twenty minutes of sleep for an hour and a half’s effort. When I awoke, I hurried to eat before my second cueca lesson. Teco was driving Jessie and I to the Cultural Corporación, but he failed to mention that he didn’t know exactly where Jessie lived. Why is it that Chileans, and men in general, never stop to ask for directions? After perusing a few streets, he recognized the house. I borrowed a replacement for my forgotten pañuela and we were good to go. Our classroom was occupied by a theatrical production so we danced in the lamplight of the square. Several natives came to
gawk at the *gringos*, but overall we did really well and it wasn’t nearly as hot as dancing inside.

Friday, September 5th

The morning was *fome* in the extreme. The Spanish teacher left halfway through the class, the math professor didn’t show up, and I finished my French test in the first half hour. Looking on the bright side, I got to finish The Negotiator and watch the good guys triumph again. I also listened to Pelao on guitar and went to the library to find some quality reading material in Castellano. I ended up with two books: *El principito* and *La isla del tesoro*. I figured a familiar story line would help patch the holes in my vocabulary. And, reading a story like *The Little Prince* in French and in Spanish before reading it in English intrigues me.

Rain clouds and rippling mud puddles dampened everyone’s mood in the afternoon. Instead of touring Curicó to take photos, Carola, Pia, Pancha and I went to a jeweler’s house to choose a present for Caro’s birthday. I had to walk a fine line between polite and honest when they were asking my opinion about different pieces. In truth, I don’t want to offend anyone. After all, “It’s not good. It’s not bad. It’s just different,” but I don’t really appreciate the colors and styles of most Chilean jewelry. To me the “*churo*” necklaces and earrings look like costume jewelry. It’s all big, bold, and bright with big bangles, beads, and buckles. Besides being polite, I also don’t want a “just because” present that I’ll have to “wince and wear” because I pretended to like it.

Pia and I made chocolate chip cookies in the afternoon, and Pancha brought Nicole, another of Caro’s friends, over to share. I dawdled in the kitchen because I was having a lot more fun talking to Norma. She was making sopapillas, fried dough with a hint of pumpkin, and she promised to let me help with the next *zapallitos*. Every time I walk in, her face breaks into a glowing smile and she loves to tell me how pretty and nice I am, like a beautiful doll. I think she appreciates the fact that I clean up after myself. It’s a big change for her with the boys around. That’s almost a culture shock in itself: dirty clothes everywhere, fights and tears, bathroom doors left open, and little sense of responsibility.

Carola told me that Caro is having trouble adjusting. Her family in Ohio uses paper plates and plastic silverware all the time to avoid dishes and her room is a mess because she hasn’t adjusted to life without *nanas*. She’s also a bit taken back by the food. Chileans don’t mix their sweet and savories. Things like barbeque sauce and chocolate covered pretzels are throwing her for a loop. I can relate though. It’ll be a while, if ever, before I get used to their pure sugar deserts. They don’t serve me the jellos, flans, and layered sugar cakes anymore, and I’m more than happy with fresh fruit. Carola didn’t even suggest that I try the *sopapillas* because she knows I don’t care for fried foods, but I did taste one, just to say that I had.

I spent the evening at Pancha’s and half fell asleep on her floor watching *Protagonistas*, a reality TV talent search, three hours of performers and behind the scene footage. Jimena and Jessie joined us for a few hours, and Teco and Carola picked me up around 1am.

Milestone: Today I had my first successful telephone call in Spanish. Jose Tomás called to beg me for the use of my camera. They’re doing a newspaper project at school and he’s trying to take last minute photos. I wasn’t so keen on lending out such an expensive toy, but I was tickled pink to have understood what he wanted. Most days I still have to have Carola interpret for me over the phone, despite the fact that I understand most everything when the Spanish is being spoken by someone in the room with me.

Saturday, September 6th

I tried to laze about, but that only lasted until 8:30 when I gave in to my *ganas* and went jogging. I decided to explore the hill in the center of Curicó and found that they make a big deal of Rocky Balboa’s summit run for a reason. An uphill jog really wears a person out, but it was worth it. I have to go back with a camera and a friend some day. The view is amazing. I mention a friend because later in the day Carola was pointing out unsafe areas of
town, and as luck would have it, I had just visited one this morning.

I passed the rest of the morning watching cartoons with the boys, the same cartoons and the exact same episodes that they had watched last night. I finally got to switch from blue to apricot in my scarf and I relished the opportunity to wear my own clothes. There’s an unconscious sense of identity in familiar clothes and I can’t wait for the weekend. During the week, it’s not worth the effort to bother with my colorful clothes after school. I usually change right out of my uniform into my pajamas.

In Chile, they take their high school sports competitions seriously. This weekend, three schools from the Alliance Française will compete in volleyball and basketball for both *varones y damas* (guys and girls). There are six games on Saturday and six on Sunday so I will be spending the entire weekend in the school gymnasium, or walking to and from said gymnasium and home to eat and change clothes.

To iron out the logistics of multi-day competitions hours away from home, Chileans have a stay-in system. It’s perfectly natural for them to open their homes to strange students for a weekend. It’s like a mini exchange program. When I go to Concepción next weekend, I’ll be staying with a host family as well. We picked up our live-in deportista from Viña del Mar at noon. Fernanda Dias is very nice and Carola took us on a quick tour of Curicó which turned out to be more than I’ve seen in three weeks.

The afternoon was filled with sports. Every hour began a new game and I’m sad to say that my team lost every game and set. It might help if we practiced together every once in a while, but what do I know? In Chile, everyone is more relaxed. Who needs practice? On a happier note, I did get to play a bit, but just a bit, and what I accomplished wasn’t much to be proud of. The coach kept me “on deck” as a warning to one of the other girls. Unfortunately, on deck means no sweatshirt and I watched my breath crystallize while I followed the game and tried to ignore the goose bumps running rampant on my arms.

The rules for volleyball here are very different. Each play gets a point no matter who served. The game is 25 points except the tie breaker which is still fifteen. The serve is still good if it hits the net and bounces over, setting is permitted as proper serve reception, but strangest of all, it’s now permissible to use your feet. The guys were trying to show off their new foot skills and botched quite a few plays. How typical! That’s another thing. They have volleyball for guys which is a lot more fun to watch because they seem to make the impossible happen.

A lot of the players are going out to the disco tonight even though it’s technically against the rules. I bowed to the title of *fome* and decided to sleep instead. I’m so worn out that I came home and just sat on the floor by the fireplace for ten minutes before changing into my volleyball uniform. I also snuck into the kitchen for chocolate cookies and a massive cup of hot chamomile tea.

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Sunday, September 7th

Volleyball went much better today. I played most of two sets and served very well. We had a little friction with the language barrier as the competition intensified, but Ignacia calmed herself enough to show me what she wanted instead of yelling at me in incomprehensible Spanish. Losses all around, but they were much easier to swallow.

The grandparents came over for dinner with Tía Isabel and Tío Pablo. We had tacos complete with *palta* and mayonnaise. Everyone loved the chocolate chip cookies I’d made, although Maxi spit out the chocolate chips, and the cookies disappeared before dinner. Afterwards, we walked to Tía Andrea’s house to wish her a happy birthday. I tried to pass on the cake because it looked like the same sugar-high layer cake from my last birthday bash, but Buvi would hear none of it. She insisted that I try at least a bite, and MMmmm… was she right. Layers of manjar, whipped cream, and custard separated the white layers of cake and it was scrumptious.
On the way home, I paused to identify Mars in the night sky. The stars are so bright here and the constellations are not what I’m used to. I miss seeing the Big and Little Dippers, but it’s neat getting to see the Southern Cross for a change. I can’t wait till summer when it’s warm enough to gaze, but I’m still adjusting to the fact that summer in Chile takes place from December to February.

I warmed up a zapallito and peeled a clementine for a late night snack. I think I’m reacting negatively to everyone trying to force feed me. The more they push, the less I eat, and then I end up hungry.

Monday, September 8th

No math teacher again. I’m beginning to sense a habit. Fran and Pia used this extra time to use my camera for the school newspaper. I hung around to chaperone because I don’t want the idea spread around that anyone can borrow my expensive little toy. Fran was actually on her knees, promising to be extra super careful. She’s such a sweet heart that I did agree to lend it before class was cancelled. She walked home with me so that I could give her a copy of the photos and she invited me to lunch next week. She dreams of being trilingual and loves to practice her English on me so I lent her my copy of Ella Enchanted to practice with. I hope she enjoys it as much as I do.

I spent the evening having tea at Buvi’s house. She’s really fun to talk to because she’s traveled, loves languages, radiates kindness, and tells good stories. We had toasted bread with palta, chilenitos, and apple pie. Palta is definitely growing on me and the pie was so delicious that I had seconds. However, the chilenitos were still too much of a sugar high and the Chileans still can’t accept that I like to drink water. In Chile, water is considered a last resort for dieters. Why else would anyone consume such a tasteless drink?

Culture note:

Jesus is a very common name here. Even the girls use it as a middle name. However, Maria is much more popular. Off hand, I’d say 90% of the girls here have Maria as their first name. I actually have an aunt named Maria with three daughters who are also named Maria (all of them!) Naturally, many girls use their nicknames or middle names for everyday purposes. Nicknames are everywhere. I don’t even know the real names of most of my classmates. They’re just known as baldy, skinny, fatso, small one, etc. I’m not joking.

Another interesting fact about names in Chile is that all the girls have a “La” in front of their name. I’m guessing that this tradition originated when women were still considered objects and therefore needed a definite article in front of their name. For this reason, staunch feminists would probably be offended by this practice, but for some reason, it makes me feel special. In Chile, I am “La Shelita” or “La Chelita” if you throw in the accent. Chileans also like to add –ita or –ito to words to make them little/cute or to show affection.

Tuesday, September 9th

We started the school day huddled around the heater, taking physics notes and finishing a lab or two. Then things got more interesting. I must say that biology dissections in Chile beat any that I participated in at Marlington. We were scheduled to examine the brain in small groups of three or four. My curiosity was aroused by all the plastic bags sitting around the classroom in the morning, and three hours later, I was slightly shocked to discover fresh brains inside. Each group had gone to the local butcher to purchase their own sample. Ours actually had a piece of the cranium embedded in the gray matter. Sanitation is a little different.
in Chile, and for this reason, formaldehyde hadn’t mutated the
different pieces and everything was clearly identifiable. The
teacher even went along with us explaining what each section did
which was much more useful than simply matching pictures on
worksheets. Several students dug right in with their hands. After
all, it’s just meat!

After lunch, I relaxed and watched an old Cary Grant movie in
English while my classmates studied English. I should have
skipped Castellano too because all they did was turn in their
projects for an hour and a half. Add to that free time the fact that
both of my math teachers decided to take the week off and I have
nine extra hours in my week.

A volleyball game against the muchachos ended badly. We lost
every set to the little boys and Coach Ricardo made the ultimatum
“Shape up or Ship out.” He’s disappointed with the lack of heart
on the team.

Cueca lessons were fabulous once again. The female instructor
told me one of her costumes complete with ribbons, belt, and
shoes. I felt like a doll only a Chilean bun had replaced
the Swedish braids. I practiced the redonda, ocho, and cuatro
esquinas, and learned the cordillera. The new step is very intimate
and I had to watch my footwork. The huaso encircles the china
(that’s me) with his pañuela and she has to prance backwards
around the circle while their faces are just inches apart.

Since it was the last lesson, we had a small fiesta with fresh
bread, kabobs, and pop shared around the room in goblets of bull
horns. The Chileans made us memory cards with white lacy
pañuelas and cowhide straps, but it wasn’t goodbye forever. We
were invited to dance in costume for the Rotary tomorrow night
and the instructors want to come and see how well we do.

Wednesday, September 10th

Senior skip day and senior pranks can’t hold a candle to the
Chilean version. I arrived at school on Wednesday to discover a
toma in progress. The seniors had taken all the desks and chairs
and piled them in a pyramid in the middle of the patio. There were
even some on the roof and suspended from the walkway pavilion.
Toilet paper, newspaper scraps, and graffiti covered everything and
the students stood around laughing, pointing, and congratulating
themselves.

Needless to say, the first classes were basically canceled as the
teachers tried to clean up the mess using both brooms and dried
palm branches. It’s scenes like these that remind me that I’m not
in Ohio anymore. Many of the students went home. I
was one of two in
philosophy class, but I’ve
had so much free time
lately that I didn’t feel
like going home. Besides,
I like that teacher.

Every once in a while
I get a cultural jolt with
just a little detail that is
commonplace for Chile,
but foreign to me. The
other day I was walking
along the road with cars
whizzing past and a dilapidated horse drawn wagon burst through the traffic driven by a poor Chilean man. I don’t normally see the darker side of life here, but the class distinction is obvious while the prejudice remains subconscious. The sweetest people in the world who thank the bus driver and bag boys wouldn’t think of saying gracias to the nana or of lending a hand with the housework.

Once again I was amazed that something as simple as changing countries, friends, family, lifestyle….. can make a person so tired. I haven’t been able to nap in years, but I was so tired that I fell asleep after lunch and then Carola and I went window shopping for cell phones. Falabela is the Chilean substitute for Wal-Mart, but without groceries. I think I found a good phone, but I need to have Dad check to see if it will work in the US, otherwise I’ll just buy a cheapie to resell before I leave. I can’t wait to go back and shop for fun. I haven’t had the time yet, but it’s on my to-do-soon list.

I talked to Carola about Christmas and discovered that it’s not common for Chilean children to buy presents for their siblings or parents. They don’t decorate either. I guess they do a better job of remembering the reason for the season. The holiday revolves around the family getting together for a big dinner in the country.

We also talked about the food. All the excess oil has been disagreeing with my stomach. Luckily, Carola is really into becoming healthier at the moment and would like to try it my way. She’s also stopped picking at what I eat, but Matias is getting the slack. She’s convinced that it’s the bread that’s making him overweight. It doesn’t help that he’s a bit moody at the moment and the atmosphere is strained.

The Rotary meeting started at 9pm. I put on my cueca costume and participated in the floor show. I danced two cuecas, but in the middle of the second one, an old Rotarian stepped in to take my partner’s place. He didn’t really know the dance so I had to improvise with hints from the instructor who stood in the background. We started dinner with empanadas de pino, cheese empanadas, fried veggies, and fresh bread. Then they brought the little grills in on the table with live coals and all. It’s called a parrilla, which reminds me of a mini barbeque. It was a smorgasbord of meat and potatoes including livers, intestines, and blood sausage. I was unadventurous and stuck with a pork chop, but it was very tasty. I also tried the wine as part of the cueca ritual. They fill an old cow horn with a drink and serve all the dancers. The Rotarians also served pisco sour and an alcoholic chocolate whipped egg mixture that looked good, but was supposedly very strong. They served mote de duraznos as a traditional dessert. I wasn’t a huge fan of the rehydrated peaches with water logged wheat kernels, but the accompanying fruit salad was amazing.

Thursday, September 11th

Today is the thirty year anniversary of the military overthrow in Chile. We, the exchange students, have all been warned to stay out of the big cities, especially Santiago because they’re expecting protests. Pinochet, who set himself up as dictator after the coup d’état, is a very controversial subject in Chile. The sad thing is that the military overthrow was supported by upper class Chileans and the US government. Both of these groups profitted from the market economy that accompanied Pinochet’s dictatorship and I hate to think that money was the driving factor that led our government to interfere in a foreign society. Many Chileans and American apologists still support Pinochet’s movement because it eventually restored democracy after the Socialist (leaning toward Communist) views of Allende, but Pinochet also committed atrocious crimes against the people of Chile. Thousands disappeared and many more were tortured. How can that ever be justified?

Someone was having a laugh at my expense. I showed up early for my second history class of the day and found the math class that wasn’t going to occur this week in full swing.Oops. That’s the first time I’ve ever missed class and it was entirely accidental. Oh well, I’ll make up for it on Monday. Carola gave me permission to have lunch with Nicole and then go shopping. It’ll be my first intentional skip day. Who needs gym and art anyway?
The weather was gorgeous. I sat out in the yard before lunch without my coat or my sweatshirt. The sun was therapeutic for my strained brain cells and the sunset was even better. I was on my way home from jogging when I just stopped in the middle of the street to watch the shifting colors. I was so happy that I just burst out singing and the locals got a free gringa serenade of Roger and Hammerstein’s “Cinderella.”

I also discovered that I do indeed like mote. I wasn’t a huge fan of the sweet version at Rotary, but the nanas made it savory today and I loved it. It’s kind of like hot rice, cooked with milk, butter, and salt, but it tastes better somehow.

Friday, September 12th

The volleyball team boarded the buses for Concepción at 2:30 on a gorgeous Friday afternoon. The sun was out and the air was warm. I actually went out jogging through the streets in just shorts and a t-shirt before lunch. The Chileans are already starting to complain about the heat, but I’m in my element. I shared a seat with Simone (Switzerland) and we talked about our favorite things in Chile and the things we miss from home while watching the landscape change. I loved the rolling hills and greenery, but Simone burst my delighted bubble. In summer, all will be dry and brown, but for now the countryside is green and beautiful. The chickens are great too! They have a million and six fluffy colorful varieties running rampant along the roadways.

Four and a half hours later, we arrived in Concepción. We crossed the mountains in fog that seemed impenetrable to descend on the city at sunset. Highways crisscross over the Bio-Bio River like a spider web and the city lights reflect off the water. Concepción is a major city, but sprawled through the hills and divided by the waterways. We were welcomed by a local dance troupe. The little girls were very unorganized and therefore adorable with their colorful leotards and streamers. Afterwards, I was introduced to my host family for the weekend. Constanza Santana is very nice and shares my froggy passion.

Saturday, September 13th

Today I discovered that Constanza is also crazy about shopping. We spent three hours before the game walking through the city center. Then after Curicó won its first game (during which I played the whole time), we spent three more hours at the mall. There were lots of private clothing and jewelry shops and I actually started seeing Chilean fashions that I liked. Blue jean, camo green, and neon orange are the hot colors for the season. It was a good thing that I left my credit card at home in Curicó or I may have been tempted beyond restraint. The lapiz lazuli, a gem stone native to Chile, is definitely worth the hype.

Since the nana had the weekend off, we had hamburgers with an abundance of palta and ice cream in the food court with Constanza’s mom and sister. To buy ice cream in Chile, you have to pay for the size and style you want before entering the shop. Then you can look at the flavors and choose your options. The cones are a mixture of sugar and wafer, and if you want to try two flavors, that’s a mixture too. They don’t stack one on top the other. The server scooped my "banana split", plopped it into the bin of “manjar con nueces” (caramel with nuts), rolled a bigger glob, and plunked it on the cone. We had to lick fast to avoid a tasty sticky mess. We didn’t get a chance to visit the beach, sigh, but I had a great time. We finished the evening with pillows, pajamas, and “Mi gran casamiento griego” (My Big Fat Greek Wedding).

Sunday, September 14th

Maybe I should be a cat burglar. I woke up early for Chilean standards, changed clothes, ate breakfast, and hopped the fence with no one the wiser. I wanted to walk along the river to get some good photos of Concepción because my only chance yesterday had been from the window of the moving car which was not exactly a prime picture taking condition. Later, I climbed out on the roof of Constanza’s house to get a different view.

The bus ride home was an adventure in itself. The boys initiated first time traveling competitors by butchering their hair
with dull scissors. I was very appreciative of my femininity at that moment. The girls’ baptism was much more acceptable. The veterans took black markers and scribbled “bautizmo Conce” over the fake mustaches and freckles on our faces. Then to get off the bus we had to submit to a gooey mess of ketchup, palta, mustard, and mayonnaise smeared in our hair and on our cheeks.

Monday, September 15th

Today is my one month anniversary and my feelings are mixed. I feel very comfortable here. I can be myself and have a daily routine. Granted, the routine is often varied by Rotary and/or volleyball activities, but the habits are forming. On the other hand, I still feel new and foreign. I can’t believe that so much time has passed because it seems like I stepped off the plane last week, and my home is still thousands of miles away. This is my first moment of homesickness since week one. I almost cried when I talked to Mom about her visit. She’s thinking of coming down in February, but I’m honestly not sure how I’ll handle seeing her and then watching her leave without me.

Nicole came over for lunch and then we hit the stores of Curicó. I wasn’t really in a buying mood, but it was fun to go out with a friend and she’s determined to dress Chilean whether she likes it or not. I ended up buying envelopes, a cute Pooh notebook that’s destined for a prize winning novel, and cute socks. I didn’t want Nicole to feel strange doing all the buying. That destroys the fun.

La Lynz (Canada) hosted a gringa tea in the country and we all relapsed into English for a few wonderful hours. I love the Spanish, but every once in a while it’s nice to speak without concentrated effort. Emily, Jacqueline, and Kristin joined the group for grilled cheese sandwiches with butter on the inside and lemon cookies filled with manjar. It was a strange combination, but tasty. Once again, I astonished the Chilean nanas by asking for water.

We talked about English classes, our host families, holiday plans, and of course, the Chilean conception of body image. I tell you the obsession is contagious. Before the night was out, they each got on the scale, converted kilos to pounds and fussed about their new weight. I refused to play the game. The sooner they accept themselves and stop trying to conform, the happier they’ll be.

According to psychology text books, we should be expecting a change in our emotions soon too. So far, we’re still on the uphill climb, exploring everything new and enjoying the sense of discovery, but depression is expected around Christmas. At this point, we’ll have developed a routine and start to feel stagnant in our study abroad journey. Then we should experience another high time when we feel like we belong in Chile, but we’ll hit another low as the reality of leaving and goodbye sets in.

Tuesday, September 16th

School was even less productive than usual because the teachers were giving out the 3rd trimester grades. Out of respect, we weren’t allowed to go home, but we lounged around in the sun. My class opted to have an asado tomorrow night instead of eating empanadas during cultural games at school. Unfortunately, I can’t go since I’ll be on my way to Chillan with my host family. Sigh. If only I could do everything.

Wednesday, September 17th

Chilean punctuality put a damper on Nicole’s and my second outing into town. We had planned to get together early and walk to the center because Nicole wanted the extra exercise. She’s already
gained kilos and joined the weight loss panic. We set the time for 8am, but Carola found out and called Lola, Nicole’s host mom. Since the stores don’t open until 9am or 10am, there was no reason for us to meet earlier, right? Wrong. Our exploration of the hill was scrapped. On top of that, Lola dropped Nicole off in typical Chilean fashion (40min late) and wanted to pick her up by noon. She even returned early and came looking for us. Nevertheless, we spent a good hour perusing the clothes shops, bakeries, and drug stores. Talking with Nicole is great fun because the Spanish just comes naturally. We both have the ganas to practice for perfection.

In the afternoon, I left with Scarlett and the female members of her family to drive to Chillan where our families own cabins. In fact, several families from Curicó have cabins in the same little cluster. Four other exchange students, my Rotary counselor, my Rotary chairperson, my Chilean grandparents, and two sets of aunts and uncles will be in attendance as well as their kids for the five day holiday.

The drive took three and a half hours, although it would have taken a lot longer if I had been driving. Chilean drivers are not prone to follow the speed limit and I tried not to wince. At one point, I actually saw a station wagon stop, reverse, and go backwards to catch a missed exit while traffic was streaming by at 120-140km/hr around him.

We arrived after dark to unpack, watch Machos, and nap. My family arrived in time for dinner and we set to work preparing the hotdogs with paltas, ketchup, and mayonnaise as well as a massive cake layered with manjar and nuts. Scarlett and I were demoted to the kids table for the evening, but we didn’t mind. We used our time to talk. She used English out of habit and I listened. I think she’d surprise herself with Spanish talent if she’d just give herself a chance and practice.

Thursday, September 18th

Early rising is a problem for cabin life. When one person wakes, the floorboards react and therefore everyone hears about it. For this reason, I lay in bed dozing and thinking until 9am. Staying up until 2am with Scarlett helped a bit. I tiptoed downstairs to have breakfast with time to spare for jogging before lunch, but the weather changed my plans. I was walking down the road with Kristin and her host family when the snow/rain started. Soon the random drops turned into a deluge and we scurried back to our fireplaces and hot water. The snow came down thick, covering the countryside and leaving a sparkle on all the trees.

September 18th is Chile’s national holiday. It’s typically celebrated with outdoor barbecues, kite flying, wine tasting, cueca dancing, and obligatory flag raisings. I was told that if a Chilean house doesn’t display a flag, they can be fined by the police. I was also warned that every year the celebrations get rained on, but they were only half right this year. The day’s menu included empanadas de pino for lunch and an asado for dinner in honor of the holiday. I tried lamb for the first time and was very impressed. The guys manned the grill and brought in bits and pieces on a wooden trencher to share with the women and children as we snacked before dinner. I can only imagine how many pieces “disappeared” and never made it to the house. It was my first taste of grilled mutton and churipan, Chilean sausage served on a toasted bun. Mmmmm… Unfortunately the traditional
celebration ended there since we couldn’t find a place in touristy Chillan for dancing cueca.

Friday, September 19th
Scarlett and I stayed up until 3am talking, and then I woke up three and a half hours later. Stubborn will power kept me abed until 8am, but at that point I was ready for peanut butter and jelly toasted over the fire and a walk on the wild side. Using Maxi’s bright purple snow boots, I entered a winter wonderland worthy of a snow globe.

I stopped at an inn to ask directions to a nearby cascade and found that the proper entrance to the path was no more than a hole in the roadside fence. Nonetheless, I climbed through and trudged through the deep snow into a wood that sparkled like a fairy land. The forest was hushed and I spent several minutes trying to find a word in either Spanish or English strong enough to describe the pristine beauty of the scene, but couldn’t. I followed the distant sound of crashing water until I reached the waterfall. It was well worth the trek.

The weather was perfect for an outdoor asado at lunch. We sat around on the porch that had been shoveled of snow and enjoyed the mountain air. When I told them about my early morning adventures, the Tías decided to gather the niños and the gringas to hike back to the waterfall. This trip was a lot wetter than the first as the warm air melted the deposits of snow in the trees.

In the afternoon, Teco, Carola, Maca, and I took the jeep down the mountain in search of leche ideal for tonight’s dessert. Tres Leches tastes remarkably like rich strawberry shortcake, but without the strawberries.

Tres Leches
Triple Milk Cake

1 can each condensed and evaporated milk
1 can cream (1/2 liter)
1 yellow or pound cake mix

-Bake cake according to directions in a large spring form baking pan. Allow to cool, cut into three horizontal layers, and set the top two layers aside.
-Mix three milks and pour 1/3 of the mixture over bottom layer until saturated. Top with middle cake layer and add more milk until saturated. Top with final layer and cover with the rest of the milk. Chill in fridge.

As we were driving along the road, we passed a cart pulled by two cows and a Chilean farmer whose moustache had definite character. Teco stopped the car and asked if the gringa could take a picture with the cows. The man smiled for the camera and took us back to his home so that I could see his chickens, turkeys, and stump collection. Over the
years, he had gathered stumps that looked like animals including a turtle, a snail, a deer, and a swan. Teco suggested that I “forget my Spanish” and just use English. The farmer was all smiles.

The cow man had a second job playing accordion in a little restaurant with a guitar player who sang traditional Chilean songs for the tourists. When we went later, there were four exchange students, a man from Canada, and a lady from Spain in the room. We all danced the cueca and a few other simple dances. The pillars and walls were decorated with leafy branches to look like armadas, leafy pavilions where the locals dance until the wee hours of the morning. We couldn’t go to a real one because the unstable structures are kind of dangerous, but the substitute was well worth it. I was having a blast. It kind of reminded me of mariachi bands in the states, but better because we could participate.

Saturday, September 20th

My days in Chillan have developed a routine: I wake up at my normal early bird hour and go jogging along the wooded roadway. Babbling brooks cross through the valley at random and the sun shimmers off the snowy peaks. I get back, make breakfast (usually peanut butter and jelly), and have two or three hours of free time to read, knit, or write. The Chileans enjoy sleeping in until 11am which means that lunch doesn’t materialize until 3pm, tea time around 7pm, and dinner at 10pm. I take a nap before dinner because thanks to Scarlett, I’m not allowed to sleep until about 3am.

Today I made banana bread while the rest of the family played Kitty, a card game much like Bonanza, but with a few minor alterations. It was great to work in the kitchen again, especially with the promise of a scrumptious breakfast, and I could still share the fun of the card game without falling asleep, cards in hand.

Banana bread
Pan de platano

2 ½ c flour
1 c sugar
3 ½ t baking powder
1 t salt
3 T salad oil
¾ c milk
3 overripe bananas
1 egg
1 c chopped nuts
(walnut or pecan)

* Mix all ingredients adding flour last
* Pour into greased 8 x 8 pan
* Bake 65min at 350 degrees
(or until toothpick comes out clean)

Sunday, September 21st

Finally, I had enough sleep. I woke up at 7:30, stretched, and jogged, full of spunk and energy. The banana bread was scrumptious as usual, but I wasn’t sure how the family liked it. They each cut a thin little slice and I had to smile to myself as I thought of the two big healthy chunks that I had for breakfast. I was afraid they’d end up throwing it away and I wanted to take it back for a week’s worth of breakfast, but it disappeared for once while I was on a walk with Buvi, Maca, and Isabel. I guess the Chileans enjoyed it more than I thought.

Before lunch we journeyed up the mountainside, zigzagging between the woods and babbling brooks with occasional cascades. The ski slopes
were very inviting, but also very expensive and we didn’t get the chance to try them out. Teco says that we might go next winter when the snow is better, but the niños didn’t mind the wait. They had a blast sliding down the hill in big garbage bags.

We also visited the hotels and thermals pools. They were very beautiful, but reeked of sulfur.

We had yet another asado for lunch. I love the smell, standing out in the fresh air, talking to the family, and partaking of the little bits that finish early. In Chile, they don’t mind “dropping” the meat one bit. Dad would fit right in with all the snacking that goes on around the grill. My first churipan was very tasty. It’s similar to Katie’s Italian sausage, but while I never really enjoyed my sister’s favorite meal, churipan has earned my vote of approval. The difference must come from different spices used in the sausage, although the toasted bun is definitely a crowd pleaser.

Monday, September 22nd

Home again, home again, jiggety jig. The ride down the mountain was gorgeous with blue skies, rolling hills, blossoming orchards, green fields, and daylight. The trip up had been rather dark so I hadn’t noticed the spectacular landscape. We saw two cows just strolling down the road and experienced more Chilean driving. They like a lot of fast stop and go action. Maca was no exception.

I spent the afternoon at Scarlett’s house with Emily, Kristin and Jacquelyn. Kristin was still venting about her family problems. She had had to leave Chillan early so that she didn’t miss any classes. She’s a good story teller and I’m not sure how much to believe, but youth exchange naturally results in problems that we all have to deal with. It helps us grow. We just have to remember that each of us and each host family is different. “Not good, not bad, just different.”

I got to talk to my family for another hour at Scarlett’s. I called home quick (because long distance to Ohio is a little expensive) to let them know that I was home and that they could call me. Since Grandma was over for dinner, they called me right back and set me beaming for the rest of the day. When we finally routed the phone line correctly (Scarlett’s phone system has separate connections as well as intercom capabilities), Katie told me lots of news from school. It was one of the best conversations we’ve ever had. She just babbled along. Maybe long distance relationships are good for sisters. They also hinted at a package that is about to be sent. I wonder what surprises it will hold.

I also started brainstorming for Katie’s sequel. She hasn’t stopped begging me for a sequel since I first finished writing The King’s Chancelings three years ago. Without a doubt, she’s my biggest fan. Writing a sequel will be a lot of work, but what a welcome home surprise. Having such a grand project will also give me something to do in all my free time this summer.

Teco installed broadband this afternoon so internet cramming is a thing of the past. I can check mail whenever I want. After checking my mail, I made a birthday card for Dad with drawings of his favorite desserts so that it’s ready to send tomorrow. I know it’s a little early, but I want it to arrive before October 1st and the Chilean mail system is not always reliable. I’ve sent letters home that have arrived in a week’s time and others that take weeks. I’m trying to track down a picture book of Chile to send too, but haven’t had any success.

Tuesday, September 23rd

I tried to be lazy and stay in bed, but ended up jogging. Gundi and I walked to the center to mail Dad’s birthday card. I enjoyed my hermano’s company and as a reward, we stopped at a bakery
and I let him pick out a treat. I bought two pan de huevos (spiral pastries with apple chunks and cream) which we munched on the way home. Gundi was all smiles.

I spent awhile talking with Norma in the kitchen. She’s going to teach me how to cook this week, Chilean style. I got to help set the table and I think she left my bed alone. I’ve been practicing the art of bed making, but until today she’s always come in and undid my work just to do it again herself. I was ecstatic until I found out that Norma is leaving us in October. The family is already searching for a replacement and I’ll have to start all over again with a new nana. The bright side is that I can start out helping myself and the nana won’t know any different. I just hope that she doesn’t drown everything in oil or Carola and I will have to have another heart to heart.

Teco gave me a grand tour of the apple trees in bloom, kiwi vines, vineyards, and his field of horses. The day and view were beautiful. Stacks of bee boxes dotted the orchards and the anxious buzz of bees vibrated through the air. Teco explained how to splice apple trees by cutting branches from one tree and inserting them into the freshly cut stump of another. I can’t believe that it works that way. We also stopped in to visit Berta. Teco’s mom is in the hospital so his lifelong nana is all alone. I let her make me chocolate milk in the microwave and she gave me lots of hugs.

This evening we had our reunion at Tio Ernesto’s house to talk about this weekend’s trip to Santiago and the travel calendar for the year. He took suggestions on other activities such as cooking classes, more dancing lessons (salsa, flamenco, etc.) and camping trips to las siete tazas (a local waterfall). We also mentioned Machu Pichu and the interest was unanimous. He’s looking into a bus trip, but that’ll be two or three days of driving just to get there. I think I’ll look for some cheap airline flights online, just a hop from Santiago into Peru where we can catch a bus.

Wednesday, September 24th

I went to mass by myself this morning. I haven’t been able to go to church for four Sundays, and I missed it. That’s why when I heard about a Wednesday service, I jumped at the chance. I ousted myself from my toasty blankets and walked half an hour to the center. I’m not completely comfortable with the Catholic symbols and prayers to the virgin, but the solemn atmosphere is conducive to prayer and reflection, and I did’ understand the priest anyway.

I got to help Norma make lentil soup and zapallitos italianos. I recorded the recipes as best as I could, but no one measures in Chile. I also discovered how much oil they put in their food before it gets to the table. I’m flabbergasted, but I’m sure that I can fix that.

Zapallitos Italianos
Stuffed Zucchini

6 medium zucchini/squash
1 large onion
1 clove Garlic
1-2 t Oregano
4 eggs
Salt
Parmesan cheese

-Boil whole zucchini for twenty minutes, halve, remove stems, and spoon pulp into a blender. Add eggs to blender.
-Line the skins on a greased baking sheet.
-Sauté onion, garlic, and oregano. Place in blender. Salt to taste.
-Fill skins with squash mixture. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese.
-Bake
* Optional- add ground beef or bread crumbs with eggs.
I went to the supermarket as well. I snooped through after mass and then went grocery shopping with Carola after lunch. She hates shopping for food and I was having a ball. There are whole aisles lined with boxed milk and butchers on duty to alter the meat any way you want it. Carola bought some cow tongue that "I just have to try." In general, I try to be open about trying new foods, but sometimes it takes definite courage and I’m not sure how this particular experiment will turn out. We also bought non diet marmalade special for Shelly and the makings for corn bread, but making chili for my host family may prove a little difficult. I need to look for tomato juice and kidney beans in Santiago when I go. I’m also going to look for Katie’s birthday present while I’m at it. I figured I could send hers with Dad’s instead of sending a separate package in two weeks.

After cueca class, I went over to Noelle’s to see her photos from home and ended up spending the night. She filled our tummies with scrumptious ham and cheese omelets followed by a manjar cake.

**Thursday, September 25th**

I returned home to make pastel de papas with Norma. They were making the same thing at Noelle’s house and I was invited to watch the process there, but Noelle was still dozing and I had trouble understanding her nana’s Spanish. Besides, Norma was waiting for me to continue our cooking lessons at home. It turns out that the recipes are very distinct. Norma adds tomato sauce and leaves off the sugar that crystallizes the top. In the afternoon, Noelle and I made a kuchen de manzanas, walked around the center, and settled on the couch to watch “Aladdin.”

**Friday, September 26th**

Emily hosted an American breakfast and I feasted on peanut butter pancakes for the first time in six weeks. Peanut butter and syrup may be a strange combination even by American standards, but I love it and I wasn’t the only one fulfilling a craving. Thirteen foreign teenagers flooded her kitchen to prepare pancakes with or without chocolate chips, French toast, scrambled eggs, fresh sliced kiwis and apple, chilenitos, and regular toast. Let’s just say we ate well.

The bus left after lunch for Santiago and our second Rotary excursion. Teco dropped Noelle and I at the station and then ran along waving goodbye. I’m definitely getting good at this public transportation thing. After arriving at the bus terminal, we had to drag our bags through the Santiago subway to Rotary headquarters where our weekend host parents could pick us up. I’m staying with Ludwig from Belgium. His Spanish is only seven weeks old, but he’s full of fun and energy. He’s also really tall and has the appearance of a scholar. Whether or not appearances are deceiving in this case, I have yet to find out.

**Saturday, September 27th**

Winnie the Pooh said it best, “The rain rain rain came down down down…” Saturday morning was scheduled full of cultural tours and activities. Unfortunately, Rotary hadn’t checked with the weather first. We tramped around the Federal Palace with raindrops falling on our heads, dashing between overhangs, and huddling close together for warmth. The guards looked pretty smart in their army green uniforms with bright white trim. They were definitely the tallest Chileans that I’ve ever seen, and I’m guessing that it’s a result of the heavy German immigration after the world wars. Our
guide spoke clearly and led us through the governor’s reception rooms with furniture dating over three hundred years. We never would have been allowed to sit down in such antiques in the states, but when in Chile... The city streets and buildings were concealed by the thick fog coating the bus windows, but we filled the time chatting. The conversations were mostly in English, but don’t tell the Rotary. I have two friends with whom I practice my Spanish all the time. Nicole (Ohio) lives with me in Curicó. We like to go window shopping and chat because we’re both at the same level and it’s fun for oddballs like us to challenge ourselves with new vocabulary. Taylor (AKA Texas) has the same gumption to practice and learn Spanish. He’s 6’3” and has a reputation for his insatiable appetite. He’s on tape many times chowing down on monster sandwiches or piling leftovers onto his plate. With him around no one needs to worry about leftovers.

After watching the police dog training and riding the gondolas down the hill surrounded by mist and rainy skies, we called it a day and hit the mall. Wouldn’t you know that the sun came out just as we headed inside. Emily, Scarlett, and I entered a formal dress shop and tried on our favorites. We picked the brightest colors and designs, and then discovered that Chilean dressing rooms aren’t designed to fit three teenaged girls, but we got some good pictures of clutter, beauty, and gym socks. We also treated ourselves to ice cream. I buffed up my vocabulary and can now order a *barquilo* (cone) in Spanish, but I ended up choosing an edible bowl with two flavors. The first was nutty with a slight caramel flavor (pretty normal); however, the second took a little getting use to. It was pineapple ice cream with big chunks of chocolate cookies. Sounds strange, but by the end I really liked it.

I intended to buy Dad’s birthday gift, but ended up with a bagful of presents for Katie instead. She’s a lot easier to shop for. Shopping successes: 
- Chile t-shirt with penguins and chili peppers 
- A fuzzy yellow pen 
- Tiny red stone hearts 
- Pretty koala paper for letter writing 

*Los Buenos Muchachos* served us a fabulous dinner with *parillas*, little barbeques that were scattered throughout the tables. We could watch our meat and potatoes sizzle on the hot coals. The floor show included *cueca*, but the highlight was an exhibition from Easter Island. Guys and girls dressed in feathers and loincloths pranced around on the stage and brought up volunteers to help. Three Belgian exchange students had to swing their hips on stage in front of hundreds of people. It was hilarious. Afterwards, everyone danced. If you can imagine
Richard Simons “Sweating to the Oldies,” you’ll have a good idea of what we looked like. The floor was packed and good natured Chileans just kind of pushed and shoved their way through the twist, disco fever, and rock and roll. We had a blast just laughing at ourselves, the dance moves, and the leaders who were sporting bright rainbow striped pants and bikini tops.

Sunday, September 28th

Most of the intercambios, especially those from Washington state were on cloud nine this morning because we stopped at Starbucks. They were in heaven scanning the different flavors of cappuccinos and mochas. I tried a hot chocolate, but wouldn’t recommend it. Nicole liked the slightly bitter taste so she enjoyed both her drink and mine. There’s no way that Kristin or Kyla will let us pass by Starbucks if we go back to Santiago so next time I’m going to get a chilled Chai Tea. I sipped Teresa’s and it was fabulous. I also bought an orange cranberry scone for the bus ride home. Tasty, but mine are much better.

We spent the entire day at Fantasilandia. The biggest amusement park in Santiago (and all of Chile) may be a sixth the side of Cedar Point. It was hot and sunny so Nicole, Texas Taylor, and I spent most of the afternoon talking in Spanish about Spanish and other topics. We also munched on a Rotary provided lunch: cheese and butter sandwiches or ham and butter sandwiches. A few lucky gents even discovered both ham and cheese between the buttered slices. Who ever heard of buttering cheese and lunchmeat? Both options were made with wonder bread. It’s the first time I’ve seen processed bread in Chile and I have to admit that it’s one American staple that I haven’t missed. Chilean nanas buy bread fresh from the bakery every morning. Usually, we have flat loaves about the size of a saucer. It’s hard to describe, but the yummy, warm, fresh, flakey goodness is one of the highlights in Chilean cuisine. Later, we rewarded ourselves with ice cream. I passed on the chocolate syrup, but the lucuma hit the spot.

During the ride home, I worked on Katie’s sequel, trying to fit the pieces together. I’m started to get excited and can’t wait until my package arrives with The King’s Chancelings. Mom is putting it in the mail tomorrow. I need to review because there a lot of details that I don’t remember, despite the fact that I’m the one who wrote it.

Monday, September 29th

My first class dissertation met with success as I spent thirty minutes relaying the differences between my life at home and my life in Chile. My classmates thought it really interesting that Ohioans don’t comment on height, weight, or hairstyles as bluntly as Chilean nicknames. They were also intrigued by the thought of riding a yellow school bus to get to school and eating lunch in a cafeteria.

Nicole and I had tea at her house. It’s absolutely gorgeous. I got a tour complete with spiral staircase, swimming pool, private bath, family photos (one with President Eisenhower and another with Pinochet), a balcony that Nicole hadn’t previously discovered, and a small library including the Chronicles of Narnia. Perhaps I can read them in Spanish. I tried to read them a few years ago, but at that point, they seemed too juvenile in English. We watched the
sunset and chatted amiably when Machos started and Carola came to pick me up.

**Tortilla Chilena**

**Chilean Frittata**

2c shredded veggies - Toss ingredients.
2 eggs - Heat lightly greased frying pan.
Salt - Pour mixture onto hot surface.
garlic powder - Cook for several minutes.

- Flip « tortilla »
- Cook several more minutes.

I made tortillas de zanahorias (carrot frittata) with Norma for lunch. They’re unbelievably easy. Thus far, I’ve seen this recipe used successfully with carrots, cauliflower, and green beans.

Tuesday, September 30th

Today was crazy and almost entirely devoted to class pictures and dressing up Shelly. I went to school with my white blazer, blue pantyhose, blue socks, and blue slacks just as instructed. I don’t have a school skirt so the girls were scrambling yesterday to find someone with an extra. It showed up this morning several sizes too large. I was walking around holding my books with one hand and clutching my waistband with the other. Eventually, Ale and Javiera stood me in the middle of our physics class and tried to fix me up with straight pins, but without success. Luckily, Javiera found a bobbie pin and the problem was solved. Next came the socks. In Chile, you don’t neatly roll down the tops of your socks because that emphasizes skinny ankles. Instead, you have to bunch the fabric over the pantyhose around said ankles. Anyway, we finally took the picture. I had to borrow a sweater last minute and then return all my clothes to the rightful owners. That’s when Chico showed up and we had to start the whole process again. I felt like a dress up doll.

After volleyball, Carola told me that her brother was flying to the United States tomorrow and could take a package with him.

Great opportunity! However, the shops are closed at 9pm and I didn’t have much ready to send. Carola and I shopped through every supermarket looking for bonbons and alfajores, manjar cracker sandwiches without the meringue. Naturally, I couldn’t find them when I needed them so I chose a Carezza bar, the chocolate I fell in love with in Chile, Chilean doughnuts (AKA fat little chocolate covered cookies), and new kind of alfajores. These ones were manjar filled spice cookies surrounded in chocolate. They were tasty, but not what I wanted. However, by this time, Carola had helped a bunch and the only other option was for her to go out early in the morning before her brother’s flight. It wasn’t worth that much trouble.

I compiled everything in my room, snacking on mashed potatoes and listening to music. Katie’s birthday gift and “just because” present were wrapped along with the sweets and everything had a note of explanation attached. I couldn’t resist joking about spreading the desserts, really just samples, over the upcoming weekends. The late night was definitely worth it.

Wednesday, October 1st

Yesterday was packed full of Rotary events. Carola talked with my school so that I could leave early and attend tea with the Rotary wives. I rushed home first to change clothes, unreasonably happy at the prospect of shedding my uniform in favor of my own colorful clothes, and grab an apple. My lunch had consisted of carrot and broccoli salad because Carola told me that the tea started at 4pm. Luckily, Noelle knew better. They don’t actually eat until 5:30-6pm. We had little bite-size sandwiches with palta, others with creamed chicken, and toasted ham and cheese. For our sweet teeth, there were little pecan pies (I had to think of Dad on his birthday) and manjar spiral cakes. I was offered chocolate powder for my warm milk, but the waiter didn’t know or chose not to acknowledge the difference between pure bitter cocoa and Milo mix for hot chocolate. That was quite a first sip.
I stayed at Noelle’s house after the tea until the reunion de hombres later in the night. We laughed to discover that we had both developed a sneaky streak in Chile. She hides granola and yogurt in her room, and Norma just started hiding my cereal under the kitchen sink so that Matias won’t eat it. It’s not that I mind sharing, but he doesn’t really like the cereal and just eats it to spite me. I might start hording bananas in my room as well. We always have plenty, but the boys eat them before they have a chance to ripen, and I just can’t enjoy firm, green bananas.

The only other exchange students in attendance at the official Rotary meeting were "Droopy" and Nicolas (our Belgians). They have yet to miss a meeting mostly because they like to drink the wine and pisco. I actually tasted the mango sour made with pisco, mango juice, sugar, and a little lemon. I knew I wouldn’t like it, but it’s cultural and Droopy insisted that I was being obstinate and shouldn’t reject something until I tried it. Well, now I’ve tried it and even took a second sip just to prove that I really didn’t like it. Now we know.

Dad had a happy birthday party with donuts and shrimp boats. I checked my email at Noelle’s house and sent him another note denying his “old fart” claim. I was shocked to learn that there was no birthday dessert since both Dad and Katie are watching their girlish figures.

Thursday, October 2nd

I did nothing in Castellano besides reading La isla de tesoro, but I took the history test which wiped me out. Luckily, the sun was shining and the mixture of peach yogurt, beautiful weather, and a quick jog revived my spirits. I was getting ready to go back to school when Tía Maca called. I ended up skipping classes to tour the chanchera (the Soler family pig farm). Scarlett, Jessie, Nicole, Mansi, Maca, and I had to cover ourselves with oversized shirts, baggy pants, and fluffy boots. I felt like a clown, or according to Jessie, I looked like an umpalumpa. We saw the lab where they prepare embryos for artificial insemination. Scientifically speaking, one male can impregnate twenty-six females with an average of eleven piglets per litter. We saw the moms, gaped at the humongous papas which could easily rival a grizzly bear for size, and adored the newborn litters. Scarlett and I both held and cuddled the babies, but Nicole and Jessie didn’t dare. Mansi was determined to take home a new pet, but Maca held her ground.

When we finished, our hair reeked of pig farm. The smell hadn’t bothered me when we were touring but when the six of us got back in the car, even I had to admit that it was overpowering. I’m just more used to it than they are. After all, I did grow up surrounded by the smell of pig, cow, and chicken manure. In all honesty, touring the chanchera made me feel right at home and I made the comment that this is fresh country air in Ohio, but my friends were less than impressed.

We had to shower before joining the other exchange students for pizza. The pizza parlor was tiny and we watched over the counter as they added toppings and shuffled our pizzas around the oven. I shared a pizza with Noelle (Brazil) and Lynz (Canada), but ended up eating half of it myself. They weren’t...
brave enough to taste the side covered in spinach, ham, and asparagus and claimed the pepperoni and cheese for themselves. Although it was a strange combination and not exactly what we ordered, after waiting an hour and fifteen minutes, I was hungry enough to eat anything and it turned out to be really tasty.

Friday, October 3rd

I spent quite a bit of time talking to teachers today. I want to switch my schedule around to take more French classes. It’s ridiculous to study in a French school and lose my grasp of the language. Granted, I’m probably the best of my class, but I still feel under par by Shelly standards. I spend so much time thinking in Spanish that it’s hard to transition. Losing art and chemistry wouldn’t upset me too much either.

Nicole, Jessie, and I went shopping through Unimarc to buy syrup and ended up cruising the aisles for over an hour. The imported dessert aisle was a trap and we were tempted beyond restraint by the brownies, the chocolate fudge icing, the granola bars, and 7up. With our treasure trove of goodies, we shared tea in the plaza by the fountain.

We arrived at Noelle’s asado fifteen minutes late and we were still the first ones there. I think Noelle was getting a little worried. Most of her guests didn’t trickle in for another two hours, but by 9pm we were having a lot of fun. Every seat and arm rest was taken and the patio was filled with students. Pia wanted us to dance, but we were waiting for the discotec. This is the first night I’ve gone out and I wasn’t impressed. There was a lot of noise and smoke, although I’m told that I came on a relatively good night. Normally, girls don’t have to pay to get in, but we did. Oh well. At least the tickets came with a free drink which would have been great if I liked the taste of alcohol. My friends enjoyed their piscocolas, piscosprites, and beers.

Saturday, October 4th

The roses are starting to bloom. My brothers think I’m a little crazy because I keep stopping at odd moments to smell a blossom or gaze in admiration at a clump of irises. It’s just pretty and special after so much cold, and by walking everywhere, I discover new wonders all the time. Last week I even searched out a few friends just to show them a rose tree that I found in the plaza. They agreed that it was well worth the effort.

For dinner, the gringas organized an Italian night. Scarlett, Kristin (California), Lynz (Canada), Nicole, and I got together to make gnocchi, pasta, and four different sauces from scratch. We started later than we had planned and didn’t sit down to eat until 11pm, but it was fun. We kept running back and forth between my house and Scarlett’s trying to scavenge ingredients and searching the web for recipes. Kristin specialized in making the gnocchi, a cross between potato balls and dumplings, which tasted really good even if they were a little soggy and had turned gray instead of white. I especially liked them with the white carbonera sauce and a little ham. For dessert, I made a double layered carrot cake with
homemade cream cheese frosting. It was very good in both taste and artistry. Lyndsey made an apple cake too. It was yummy, but I liked my dessert better. We had potfuls of noodles left over. Luckily, we’re taking them with us tomorrow for the family lunch.

Sunday, October 5th
After mass, we picked up Emily and headed to the campo. Nicole had camped out with me over night and Lyndsey had stayed with Scarlet so we made quite a gringa group as we sat on the patio with asado, ensalada, and leftover gnocchi. They also had a pasta salad made with palta and noodles. Mmm… The exchange students sprawled on the grass and relaxed until tea time.

The carrot cake didn’t travel with us after all. Carola and Teco were enamored with their pre-breakfast slice and decided to keep it in our refrigerator at home. I’m not complaining. I had another big piece for dessert and doubt that it’ll last past tomorrow.

I also made banana bread because Buvi brought me some perfectly “past their prime” bananas as a present. I do believe she’s expecting a chunk of yummy bread in return.

I put my foot down and refused to translate Matias’s Rotary application for him. Teco didn’t see my point that an exchange student has to work for the opportunity of a lifetime, but Carola supported me and Matias and I worked until 11pm ironing out the pieces. We’ll have to finish tomorrow during lunch because it’s due in the afternoon. Nothing like last minute homework!

Monday, October 6th
I went and talked to the director about changing my schedule. Art has been replaced by freshman level French and even though it’s two levels lower than what I’m taking now, the material is much more difficult. How does that work? I have to strain to pick it all up, but the extra effort is worth it. On Wednesdays, I’ll go to half my math class which is plenty of time to pick up the worksheets, to a sophomore level French class, and then skip the rest of chemistry. I don’t understand it anyway. It seems that I can do pretty much whatever I want because the teachers are so amazed that a student, especially an exchange student, would actually put effort into school work.

The afternoon was awful. I’m still exhausted from so many late nights this weekend, the boys were whining, Matias was being Matias, and my banana bread was ruined. Norma took the bread out early and it never hardened correctly. I had to throw half of it away, but the remains look salvageable. We took a quarter over to Buvi since she bought the rotten bananas. She told me that she actually had to convince the store clerk that she really did prefer the brownest ones. We also brought her two slices of carrot cake.

I decided to take a bath to boost my spirits, but our calefactor wasn’t working. Next, I decided to shower in Carola’s and then take a nap listening to music. However, when I undressed and stood ready to go, Norma rushed in to say that the plumber had taken both water heaters. What else could I do but cross the street and borrow Scarlett’s shower. I was amazed to find that they have a Jacuzzi and I got to laze in luxury for my first hot bath in nearly two months. By the time I got out, I was glowing and felt fantastic. My entire mood did a flip flop and I didn’t even mind helping Carola finish Matias’s application. I also found out that my new sibling, the exchange student taking Matias’s place, will be a girl.

Tuesday, October 7th
Rain and lots of it. Carola had her work cut out for her running kids back and forth, especially since all our schedules were different. The wind gusted and it got cold again. At volleyball practice, I received my very own jersey complete with my name
and the number 17. What a great souvenir! I can’t wait to try it out at the Inter-Alianza tournament in Viña this weekend.

Wednesday, October 8th
The school bus left at 7am and I was impressed that we were actually running on time. The five hour trip passed in a daze although the foggy cloud cover was gorgeous wrapped around the mountain peaks. We arrived in Viña and the city sprawled before us. Colorful buildings of every shape and size covered the hillside like a child’s Lego jumble. The road wound back and forth in its descent, but we still had to creep along. Bad brakes would be fatal in Viña, but the ocean is amazing. Huge rock outcroppings cut through the pounding waves and I wanted to rush to the beach to put my hands in the Pacific and frolic barefooted in the surf.

My host family fed me an interesting lunch. Someone had gotten signals crossed and the nana thought that I was on a no salt diet. I grabbed the salt shaker first thing and ruined that idea. I also gave my first prayer in Spanish. That was interesting. With all my practice in Spanish, I’ve never stopped praying in English.

Afterwards we toured Valparaiso. I thought the whole city was Viña, but I guess there are several districts. My face was frozen in Wow position. I would have liked to take more pictures, especially of the diverse architecture, but it was kind of difficult from a moving car. We did stop at the National Congress and watched part of a congressional session. It looked about as efficient as my history class, but with worse attendance. I had to leave my ID at the security desk while we toured. Later, we stopped at a government office to buy post cards and a poster. I almost bought a painting, but the family suggested that I wait for a less touristy area to buy my souvenirs. As a random observation, Viña claims not one, but at least three McDonalds, a Burger King, and a Pizza Hut. Nice restaurants line the main street that borders the casino. They seem to serve every ethnic food you could wish for: Arabic, Oriental, Italian, Chilean, Indian….

The Inter-Alianza is a big deal. It’s like an Olympics for all the Alianza Francesa schools in Chile. We filed in under spot lights and camera flashes to the sound of inspirational music. The entire ceremony was conducted in French with some Spanish translation. It’s sad to admit that the French was easier to understand than the Spanish I’ve been practicing for the last eight weeks. There were folk dances from both Chile and France along with the national anthems for both countries. I didn’t feel threatened by these shows of patriotism because everything is decked out in red, white, and blue just like home.

Thursday, October 9th
This morning, I experienced my first earthquake around 3am. It was just a baby and I hardly even panicked, but the ground was definitely moving. It felt like the earth was rocking me to sleep in my bed.

We lost to Concepción and I only got to play in the third game which was probably for the best. I woke up with green goo, no voice, and completely exhausted despite nine hours of good sleep. I spread myself out in the shade to nap until the cheerleading mamas from Curicó found me. Motherly instinct set in and I was sure to catch a cold on the ground. They made me move to a sunny bench and I decked myself out in long sleeves to prevent sunburns. Unfortunately, they also wanted to prescribe medicine. I wasn’t sure they understood me and I was very hesitant about popping foreign pills without knowing what they were for. I ended up humoring them with an herbal bacteria fighter. At least, that’s what I think it was.

At the track meet, I saw my first real life, wild tarantula. We were lounging around the track field when a friendly neighborhood spider meandered past. This was not your average daddy long legs but a full grown tarantula. Needless to say, I was a little freaked. The guys were having a ball playing with it and passing it back and forth.
Finally, taking a big breath, I let one of them put the spider on my jacketed arm long enough to snap a picture. I had a hero standing just out of sight ready to rescue me, but there were no fainting spells. Hurray for courage!

It was also a very lucky day. I found a four leaf clover in the yard and met a lady who had been an exchange student in Ohio. She told me all about the food she missed and what she brings back when she visits the US. The major thing was brownies and Amish/pita bread. She also said that if I missed good ice cream, I have to go to Bravisimo in Santiago. They have every flavor that I could ever want to try and some that I won’t. We talked for most of the afternoon (she in English and I in Spanish). Then she took me to the huge supermarket to buy syrup for American pancakes. She wouldn’t even let me pay for it.

The sunset over the ocean was spectacular. My host dad and I watched the clouds change from the cliff side. He explained that spring is the best time for sunsets because the humidity of summer creates a cloud mass instead of the fluffy layers that radiate color.

Tonight I had my first empanadas de queso, the Chilean version of grilled cheese. It was gooey and yummy with a flaky crust. Once again I was reminded how much feeding people in Chile is a sign of welcome as the courses kept coming: empanadas, pork chops, potatoes, ensaladas, and postre. I had the honor of picking out our dessert and we ended up with an apple strudel for today and a kuchen de ricotta for tomorrow.

breakfast. I thought I was good with my OJ, toast, and honey, but they take feeding guests very seriously in Chile. Next came jam, a special whole grain toast, apple strudel, and sesame seed butter. By the time the milk, cereal, and kuchen came out, I was ready to politely call it quits.

We won our game and I got to play one of the best games of my life. Ricardo was playing around with our rotations and put me in as falso. I had to learn a new position in less than three minutes, but boy did we get results. I play opposite the setter and therefore always end up in the server’s corner no matter where I start. My feet are always moving and I don’t even have time to think. I actually played so well that the coach from Santiago, the school everyone dreams of beating, asked about me. Ricardo says that I can start tomorrow.

The friendly atmosphere of the Inter-Alianza is amazing. The competition is fierce and tears are common, but afterwards the students mingle between teams. They have old friends from past host families and make new ones each year. It’s amazing to me that they keep so close even though they’re separated by hours of distance. High school bands entertained us with a concert under the stars. Some were good, others deserved rotten tomatoes, and despite the fact that most of the songs were in English, I still couldn’t understand them.

Saturday, October 11th

We played hard, but lost twice. It’s a shame that the girls like to play the blame game, especially since they have a handy scapegoat in the gringa. Honestly, it can’t all be my fault. I actually lost my temper with the setter and gave her a good piece of my mind at one point. She can’t expect me to always be where she wants me if she doesn’t explain to me the game plan. The competition was fierce and the stifling heat of the gymnasium didn’t help either. In the mean time, Coach Ricardo and the referee had a good laugh at my expense. I didn’t understand the ref’s request and Ricardo responded, “Yo gringa. No entender.” Roughly translated he said, “I foreigner. No understand.” I guess
they don’t need blond jokes in Chile. Exchange students are easy targets.

The closing ceremony was just as impressive as the opening. Spot lights, medals, and more folk dances accompanied the awards. Afterwards, my team headed down to the beach where I got to wet my hands and my feet in the Pacific. My friends were sure I was going to die of chill, but it was worth it. Simone and I bought McSwings at McDonalds. Mine had Smarties, which are the Chilean equivalent to M&Ms, and hers had chocolate cookie crumbs known as Triton. Halfway through we swapped cups. I really need to have a talk with the manager of Ohio McDonald’s about the serious lack of manjar in our ice cream.

Sunday, October 12th
Okay. I admit it. I slept in until 11am and I’m officially sick. Carola made me walk over to Buvi’s house for a check up. It turns out that my Chilean grandmother is a doctor. How handy. Buvi was still in her pajamas and bathrobe, but she was really nice and her explanations made me extremely confident in taking her advice. I had to strip down to my unmentionables while she checked my breathing and pulse, and then I piled the layers back on so as not to “catch” cold. I was wearing a tank top, two sweaters, and a jacket all afternoon while my companions lounged in t-shirts and jeans.

We had a picnic lunch and asado in the mountains. The road up the hillside was even more twisted than Viña. Lots of babies romped over the blankets and I made the mistake of eating the skin on my potato. That seems to be an oddity in Chile, but after being baked in the coals, it was super yummy. Super is an adjective that I’ve picked up here in Chile. Despite the fact that it’s not technically a Spanish word, my classmates use it all the time.

I just found out that there will be no school for me for quite a while. Actually, Teco spilled the beans and ruined Carola’s surprise. It seems that Maca, Scarlett, Noelle, Carola, and I are heading back to Viña on Tuesday to spend a week site-seeing. The following week I will be down south with the Rotary. Then Noelle and I are going to visit the Island of Chiloe with the junior class for the week leading up to Spring break.

Monday, October 13th
Katie’s birthday card went in the mail today. Hopefully, it will arrive in good time for November 6th. Dad’s card still hasn’t made it to Ohio.

I went with Carola today to pick out yarn for my mother’s scarf. I have two or three rows left on mine and then I can start a brand new project. Just in time too. My neck warmer is finally ready and the weather is gorgeous. The locals are already complaining about the heat, but I think I’m going to fit right in with the Chilean summer climate. Teco said that the average temperature stays in the high 90’s which should be great for swimming. A man came this morning to clean our pool and I found out that without the green scum, it’s pretty deep. I can’t wait to try it out.

Tuesday, October 14th
I brought Starbursts to class today to celebrate Rena’s birthday. They were a huge success and much more popular than jelly beans. I started out just passing out some of the candy then gave the rest of the bag to the birthday boy. Suddenly, he had a lot more friends and a huge smile on his face.
We packed our bags for Viña in wonderful heat. Ironically, the clouds rolled in as we approached the beach. Noelle and I went swimming in the pool before tea and then Scarlett decided that she wanted to swim too so our paseo through the city was delayed. We visited the beach after dark and drove through the lighted streets past a beautiful bridge that I had just seen the week before on an episode of Machos.

Wednesday, October 15th

Scarlett and I set our alarm clock cell phones to go off at 8am and headed to the pool. Ten minutes later, the pool cleaner kicked us out. We were only an hour and a half early.

After breakfast, we met the second in command of the Viña police force, a friend of Scarlett’s host dad, and his chauffeur who drove us around in the jeep. We saw the Congress with a great guide and were invited to a classical music concert in the evening. Too bad our formal attire consisted of jeans and tennis shoes. We drove up, down, around, and through quite a few of the forty-two hills of Viña and had many Chinese fire drills as we got in and out of the jeep to take photos. We also rode up two acensores, a cross between a trolley car and an elevator, and wandered through little artisan shops.

I missed Mom when we visited Pablo Neruda’s house. He has such an interesting collection of colored glass, bottles, old furniture, and model ships. The museum also had a great gallery of paintings and I had no one to pick favorites with Mom and I have a tradition of trying to guess which painting in any given set is the other’s favorite.

Today is my two month anniversary in Chile and it’s strange to think that we’ll both be different people when I return. It would have happened anyway with college, but still, spreading my wings leaves me with mixed feelings. I miss my family and the closeness of being with them everyday. One phone call a week can’t substitute a walk down the road or an hour of dinner preparation in our kitchen. At the same time, I’m completely content here in Chile. I’m living my life with the same mindset that held back all the tears at graduation: “Changes happen and that’s not a bad thing. There’s always something good to enjoy in new surroundings, and with a little optimism and a smile, there’s no need to regret what we leave in the past because the memories will always be with us.”

At the end of the day, Noelle treated us all to ice cream as a thank you for being brought along without her mama chilena. I sat out on the balcony to watch the sun set, and better yet, to watch the after affects, for almost an hour. I was thinking, praying, and enjoying while the rest watched Machos. After dinner, we headed to the supermarket and detoured to the Cinema when we found out the store was closed.
Thursday, October 16th

The sun was out in force as we hit the beach. I was wimpy and covered up after twenty minutes on each side, but the rest wanted to change skin. Scarlett now lives up to her name and Noelle is lamenting her decision to use the sun block with SPF 8 because she didn’t burn well enough. I used the SPF 30 which shocked my companions and I was determined to swim in the Pacific Ocean no matter how crazy they thought I was.

It was fabulous. I could hardly move against the current and had to roll with the waves and firm myself against the sand when they receded. I bounced along like we used to do in South Carolina, but it wasn’t the same without all my crazy cousins. I laughed as the girls on the beach braved the water up to their waists and then ran back, cowed by the cold. I was already numb, but I kept battling the crests until Carola called me in for lunch. 6pm isn’t too late for lunch, is it? Afterwards, we packed our bags and headed to Maca’s apartment in Santiago.

Friday, October 17th

Sightseeing Santiago is much more fun without rain clouds. We mounted the hill to see the statue of the virgin and stopped in the picturesque church for a moment of reflection. The air had a hushed, sacred quality even though I could hear soul music playing in the background. The walls were carved into stone murals and painted.

Next came a much more serious task: shopping. We entered a neighborhood filled with tiendas devoted solely to lapiz lazuli. I was determined to find Mom a pair of earrings, and Carola and Noelle were anxious to help. They modeled the jewelry and then brought Noelle in as a replacement since her face is more similar to Mom’s. I finally chose dark blue globes ringed in silver with a matching pendant. Carola didn’t like them so I was very hesitant to decide, but something about them struck me. It was the store clerk who suggested that I had already made my choice. The earrings had never left my hands as I looked over all the rest. Then I fell in love. A dangling necklace with lapiz lazuli stars struck my fancy and I had to borrow some plata from Carola to pay for everything. I was enchanted and wrestled with sending my necklace to Katie for Christmas or treasuring it myself. Carola convinced me that sometimes you just need to buy yourself a present.

Santa Lucia is a neighborhood packed with cheap, eclectic clothes shops. It’s “the place” to go if you’re a Chilean teenager. I found a Chile t-shirt to send to Dad and Carola me regaló (bought me as a present) a flowered skirt and bright pink tank top. I liked the outfit a lot, especially since the blue flowers go well with my new necklace. I also splurged and dared to buy a strapless tube top, my first ever. It’s blue too. I think I’ve started a pattern and Carola approves. She says I need to wear livelier colors to show what a happy person I am. Not to mention, I’m in serious need of a tan. They were horrified that I wanted to put sun screen on to prevent a burn.

My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Akenhead, emailed to tell me that my Chilean Updates are the next reading project for the fourth graders at Washington Elementary. They’re going to read my emails as they learn about South American culture and geography. I can’t believe I’m going to be a social studies/geography lesson!
Saturday, October 18th

Ah... A day of rest all to myself. The family disappeared early for a tennis competition and I got to sleep in. After jogging, I carried my peanut butter and jelly sandwich to my room and started downloading pictures. It’s a long, but worthwhile process. I worked all day to post the photos on webshots.com and answer emails, but I did take a short break for lunch at Scarlett’s. They had mashed potatoes instead of the traditional Saturday French fries just for me. Scarlett and I also took half an hour to tan on the patio. I had to email Mom and ask her to send down my bikini. I still don’t think I’ll wear it, but it seems like everyone in Chile will be wearing them, and if I need to fit in, I would like my own. It’s a bit more modest than the stringy swimwear that I’ve seen here, and Noelle tells me that Chilean bathing suits are downright conservative compared to the Brazilian variety.

Sunday, October 19th

We left the house at 10:45 for the 10:30 mass. It’s gotten to the point where I just shake my head and laugh. After church, I whipped up a batch of no-bake cookies and Rice Krispie treats. We couldn’t leave for lunch until after a very important tennis match and Carola was in charge of postre and thus, by default, so was I.

The game of the day was Farkle. According to Claudio, Scarlett’s host dad, my luck in love must be pretty good right now because I lost horribly in both games. Bringing the dice with me was a good idea.

Farkle- a game played with six dice

1=100
5=50
Three of a kind = the number x 100
(ex: three 3s = 300, three 4s= 400)
Three 1s = 100
A run of all six = 1500 (ex. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

*On your turn, you roll all six dice, setting aside those of point value. You may then roll the remaining dice in an attempt to get more points.

*You must score at least 500 to record your score the first time and get on the board.

*You may stop at any time, record your score, and pass the dice to the next player.

*If you roll and receive no new points, you have Farkled. You lose all points for that round and pass the dice to the next player.

*Once a player has passed 50,000, every other player has one chance to beat him or he wins.

Rotary excursion #3

I spent the evening doing last minute packing and answering emails before boarding the Rotary bus bound for the south. The Rotary students, thirty-seven in all, and the counselors made camp in a cabin community in the outskirts of Lican Ray. The guys took one, European girls in another, and the American gringas were divided into the four remaining. It seemed strange in light of Rotary’s goal to intermix cultures that we were so segregated, but what do I know? The cabins were really homey except for the lack of hot water. We may not be showering as often as normal. Each one had a kitchen/living room, two rooms with bunk beds, and master bed room. I ended up solo in the big bed because Lynz (Canada) was sent to the non-American girls’ cabin. We were responsible for our own breakfasts supplied with fresh bread, eggs, cheese, butter, and sugar-free jam (even the Rotary is diet conscious in Chile), but we’ll have lunches and dinners together.
Monday, October 20th

Plum/Prune jelly is really good with bread for breakfast, especially after little or no sleep on an overnight bus ride. We spent the morning walking through Lican Ray as the mist battled the rain. The misty mountains crowned the lake and there was a definite feeling of spring in the air. Everything is green and fresh. Newborn lambs and baby chicks cover the grassy hillsides.

Villarrica was fun. We split up in groups for two free hours. There were lots of wood and wool crafts at the artisan shops. I bought two painted wooden ducks to send home just because they abounded and amused me, but the pastry store was by far the best. I was also amazed by the amount of fruits, veggies, and seafood being sold on the wharf.

The girls of our cabin spent a good hour deciding who of the exchange students we’d choose to marry. Some girls like Scarlett went down the list crossing off potential husbands one by one only to arrive at the end and have to start over. Luckily, there are only nine. Others spent an eternity trying to distract the group and avoid answering. I had to choose Taylor because I know him best, he’s a Christian, and we talked a lot in Santiago, but Preston was my second. I spent the day walking around with him and he’s pretty cool, although really shy.

After dark, we braved the cemetery to reach the supermarket. After so much meat and potatoes, I needed some fruit and the others were having sugar cravings. We hit the jackpot with fresh fruit and veggies, stocking our fridge with bananas, apples, oranges, and carrot sticks. Yes, there were also a few bags of chips, chocolates, and ice cream, but that was their doing not mine.

Taylor and Preston accompanied us and succeeded in causing a few screams as we passed through the tombstones. Note to self, next time don’t bring along the guys. They like to jump out at odd moments to inspire girlish shrieks of terror, but I must admit that it was more fun that way. Even if we had to watch our step. The grave sites in Chile are bordered with low white walls so that the grave sits like a depression in a topless stone box. We even turned the tables and made the guys play the “who would you marry” game, but only one was brave or silly enough to answer. Upon questioning, Preston decided that he would marry me because we both like chai tea. Gotta love that logic.

Tuesday, October 21st

There is no rhyme or reason in Rotary. We woke up at 6:30 to drive to Pucon where nothing opens until 10am. After standing around for an hour, we headed off to view two separate cascades. The countryside is gorgeous and pristine. Clouds cap the mountain peaks and lakes show up around every bend. We took a pontoon ride through a lake that has an underground river connecting it to another. In summer, a huge chunk of the lake disappears including the visible river because there’s no snow melt off.

I was really cold all day. Before breakfast, I was running between cabins in search of the elusive promised bread. It seemed nice and warm then so I left my coat in the cabin when we rushed to get on the waiting bus. At first, Kathryn lent me her jacket, but I had to return it for our walk. Noelle lent me her new scarf and after a long “chilly” day, Preston bought me wool gloves at an artisan shop. He’s really nice, but rumors of a crush are already starting to fly and
since my affections are still tied up in Ohio, I have to tread the thin line of keeping a friend while discouraging romance.

The chief Rotary guy ruffled quite a few female feathers today. In the morning, he offered all the students the option of scaling the volcano or white water rafting. I wanted to tackle the volcano, but this is where we ran into our first sign of extreme male chauvinism. In general, I don’t notice the gender discrimination in Chile, other than gym class where they claim girls can’t do boy style pushups without hurting themselves. I had fun disillusioning them there.

Anyway, our Rotary chief gave us all the choice of activities, but when the time came, he only offered the boys and European girls the chance to master the volcano. He said, and I quote in translation, “American gringas are too weak and fragile, and I don’t want the whole group to have to turn around half way.” Needless to say, that raised a few hackles and the determination of many Americans. Eventually, he raised the cut off line from nine to eighteen, but Nicole and I backed out so that Taylor and Brad could go together. They really wanted to go, but were willing to stay behind to let us take their places. Luckily, I was able to console Nicole with some yummy Chilean ice cream.

While I’m on the subject of food, I have to tell you about the great pastry shops. Visiting and choosing postre (dessert) is my favorite in-town activity. It’s best to go with friends because you can each try something different and share. We’re all becoming very Chilean, and the pastries just get passed around for bites. The highlights were queque de pasas (a dense spiced dough that reminded me of fruitcake, but without the fruit and nuts, just raisins), brownie (white cake with chocolate chips and thick chocolate frosting), and a croissant filled with chocolate warmed until perfectly gooey. Mmmmmm.

Wednesday, October 22nd

Wow! I love white water rafting and can’t wait to go again. It definitely made up for missing a trek up the volcano and the 5am wake-up call that went with it. We arrived at the boat launch, and found out that you really can’t wear layers of clothes under the wetsuits to keep out the cold. For us rookies, that was a big surprise. We had to strip down to our underwear or even less to put on the rubbery suits. The choice was a commando rafting experience or a commando walking tour through Pucon in the afternoon. (note-commando signifies a lack of undergarments) I had the best luck and got to sit in the very front of the raft. Our guide was a bit skeptical that I could pull my own weight (sometimes being tiny has its disadvantages), but I had gumption, determination, and the support of my friends who vouched that I really was an athlete. Finally, the guide gave in, but he put the only other guy in our group next to me. LOL! That plan backfired in his face. Preston couldn’t paddle to save his life and actually dropped his oar in the rapids. His name changed to “monkey” just so that the guide could get his attention quickly.

On the other hand, I did great and thrilled each time we crashed through the water. I was soaked and got the full force of the waves in my face, but I was yelling the whole time with exhilaration. The natural surroundings were fabulous. The nearby mountains and bamboo groves could have been hung on the wall of a Chinese restaurant and the volcano’s peak stood out in the background. I traveled the last bit of river floating with the current thanks to a quick shove from Preston. Only when I climbed out at the landing
did I realize how cold the water was. I received more than a few odd looks as a jogged off the uncontrollable shivers.

The rafting team also had the opportunity to explore the volcanic caves while we waited for our friends. I really am a nerd and enjoyed hearing about the different kinds of explosions and volcanic rocks that can be formed. The actual cave was a lawsuit in the making. You would never find anything like it in the US. We started out by crossing a wooden suspension bridge that would have featured well in an action/adventure movie. Water dripped from the ceiling like rain as we passed through the badly lit tunnel on an uneven rocky path without handrails. We all sported fashionable orange helmets which came in very handy because even I had to duck in three places. On the bright side, we did get to turn out the lights and sing Happy Birthday to Teresa while she made a wish.

Those who didn’t brave the rapids had a tougher task, climbing the snowcapped volcano. In the end, their adventure amounted to eight hours of trekking through icy wind and icy terrain. Several of my friends said it was so horrible that they would never ever even consider doing it again, but at the same time, they have a very nice feather to add to their caps.

Thursday, October 23rd
Raindrops keep falling on my head…
Despite the fact that we had to trudge down to the bus amid spring showers, we were on time this morning. The good news is that no one melted and there are officially no witches among the exchange students, but the discrimination is still in play. It was the American gringas that made it to the bus by 7am. After waiting half an hour outside the locked bus, a quick phone call revealed that the guys and the European girls had been given another hour to sleep in. Apparently, plans had changed, but nobody told the gringas. I had even talked with one of the counselors at 6:30 and she forgot to mention the extra hour to me or her cabin members.

Valdivia was a cool city filled with art fairs and neat crafts. I bought an alpaca cap made by the local Mapuche Indians. I might have gotten a knitted bag or sweater if we had more time, but lunch was upon us.

We boarded a double decker boat and sailed down the river as the crew served us fresh salmon, blue crabs, and shellfish from the wharf. We disembarked to explore the island of Marcena which housed the ruins of an old fort and a gorgeous Maine-like coastline. As we returned home, a rainbow arced across the river and filled the sky with color. It was absolutely beautiful.

Friday, October 24th
We spent the afternoon enjoying the hot springs at Huipe. It took a bit of courage to enter the frigid mountain river that ran alongside the pools, but a slippery rock helped speed up the process. Hopping from
one extreme temperature to another set my body on fire with pins
and needles, but it was a lot of fun.

Saturday, October 25th
It was raining so hard this morning that our Rotary counselors
decided to call it quits and head for home. We crawled back into
bed for a few more hours as the gentle pitter patter of rain drops on
the cabin roof lulled us to sleep. We had lunch at a big open
marketplace filled with butcher shops, restaurants, pastries, and
crafts. I bought myself a big woolen manta which looks a lot like a
Mexican poncho. It’ll be perfect for campfires and star gazing,
really soft, warm, and definitely Chilean.

My first package from home was waiting for me when I got
back to Curicó. After nearly two weeks traveling through the
postal system, it had finally arrived. How exciting! Along with my
bikini, I found two novels written in English, a few Taste of Home
magazines, my favorite granola cereal, and chocolate chips. I see
more cookies in my future.

Sunday, October 26th
My inbox was bursting with lots of wonderful emails, but I
only had time to answer a few. My new exchange sister is from
New Zealand and her name is Jen. She seems very nice. Her
Spanish skills are under par, but she knows a bit of French and
Japanese. She likes reading, singing, Disney music, cooking, and
writing. I think we’ll get along great.

We had an asado for
lunch at the equestrian
club owned by Fran’s
parents. It was nice to
see her after so long.
She and I walked Emily
and Jacquelyn through
the aspen lined fields to
see the pretty jumping
horses where we met
Agosta. She lives in New York, but she was born in Chile and is
taking a year to visit with her relatives. She’s only fifteen and
looks even younger, but she’s very outgoing. She joined right in
with our game of Farkle and then hung out with us in the back of
the Subaru. My manta makes a pretty good pillow as well as a
heater.

Monday, October 27th
Happy Birthday Norma! I made her a card and gave her a blue
scented candle. I left
them both on the counter
for her to find and she
burst into tears. I think
Carola is close to
convincing her to stay
with us until December.
During once, we
presented her with a
torta de mil hojas and
sang Happy Birthday.

Tuesday, October 28th
In physics, my classmates were playing with mercury. This
struck me as odd since we’re not even allowed to have mercury
thermometers in the US anymore.

We have a new exchange student in school. Carson is from
Germany and he’s only here for a month, but he agrees with me
about the productivity, or lack there of, that occurs in most Chilier
classes. “Nadie hace nada,” he exclaimed with his adorable
German accent. “Nobody does anything!” As for me, I’m working
hard to ward off the typical slacker title. That’s why I decided to
tackle Hija de la fortuna, a novel by Isabel Allende, a famous
Chilean author, for my Spanish class. It’s strange that the teacher
does nothing concerning the book except give the test. I’m so used
to work sheets and class discussions, but in Chile everyone is left
to fend for themselves. Luckily, the story is really interesting. A
pampered girl from Valparaiso (which I visited) decides to follow her lover to California during the gold rush. Disguised as a young man, she witnesses the discrimination between social classes and races, and makes a life for herself.

Once again I was the only member of the volleyball team to show up for practice. One of these days, I’ll learn to leave well enough alone and just rest, but I went for a quick jog before going home. I’m exhausted, but I still had to pack my bags for the school trip to Chiloe, shower, write a Chilean update, and download photos onto webshots.

Wednesday, October 29th

Carola and I left the house early to make my third and final withdrawal to pay for my trip. I was rather surprised when I tried to take out all 300,000 pesos (about $500) on Monday and learned that I had a daily limit of 120,000 pesos at the Bryc ATM. That would have been a good thing to know ahead of time.

The bus left Curicó around 7:30 and I amused myself by knitting part of Mom’s bufanda. I got nearly two feet of the scarf completed and only had to unravel once. I’m taking immense pride in doing every stitch myself. I also sang Noelle to sleep and lost myself in my Taste of Home magazine. There were so many recipes that I want to try, but I’ll have to wait until the end of May to try them because most of the ingredients don’t exist in Chile. Looking at the recipes made me miss Mom’s cooking: stew, chicken-n-dumplings, BBQ ribs, homemade pizza….. Chileans really don’t like tangy flavors. Any mixture of sweet and salty doesn’t appeal to their appetites.

While we traveled, the first of many collecciones was passed out to all the students. These goodie bags contained a treasure of potato chips, cookies, candy, pop, juice, and chocolate. I was amazed to see many of the kids sit down and eat the whole package, and I’m talking five or six different snack foods, between lunch and dinner.

We arrived in Castro at 11pm and learned that Maria Jesus’ mom had passed away from cancer and there were a lot of tears.

Many of the girls wanted to turn the bus around and support their friend, but they settled on going to midnight mass and praying for her. By the time we reached the hospedaje, I was beyond tired and near tears. I couldn’t understand what people were telling me and just wanted to sleep. We stayed the week in a hostel called “The Mole.” Fifty-four large stone steps led to the entrance, and by the top even my legs burned from the effort, and I thought I was in good shape. Noelle and I shared a room and the arrangement was perfect, except... no heat. The nights were freezing, and I’m sure the temperature dropped at our doorway. I slept with four socks, two pairs of pants, and three sweatshirts including one with a hood in a futile determination to ignore the cold.

Thursday, October 30th

The view is amazing. From my window, I can see the Pacific Ocean as it winds through the islands. In the south, I can see the snowy mountain peaks of the Andes over the blue ocean. It took my breath away, my favorite scene of the whole trip. A yellow flowering bush covers most of the hills. The beautiful plant is a pest to the locals because it’s almost impossible to control and takes over the land, ruining it for farming, but the yellow landscape is so pretty. Boats fill the shoreline painted boldly in blues, oranges, reds, yellow, and greens. If the fisherman doesn’t go out in the morning, his ride is left high and dry in the sand thanks to the drastic tide change. It was amusing to see these
huge boats sitting in the middle of a large field of beach, but I was assured that nighttime will find them floating merrily along again. The houses are adapted to the tide as well, built on stilts. I even saw a great model of the townspeople pulling a home over the countryside. On Chiloe, if a family chooses to move, their house goes with them. They use oxen for brute strength and roll the frame over logs. It’s a community effort with a big asado at the end as a reward for all the help.

The main purpose of this trip is for the sophomore class to study the geography and architecture of Chiloe so we spent a lot of time visiting churches. The mixture of religion and superstition is still very strong here. Each iglesia faces the ocean, out of which comes their means of life, and serves as the focal point of the town. Jesuit missionaries and natives worked together to construct the buildings out of a native tree that only exists on Chiloe and is now extinct. One of the churches doesn’t even have metal nails, just wooden stakes. The ceilings are all arched to represent the sky/heavens, but in all practicality, the shape is probably due to the boat building culture. It’s easy to imagine the ceilings as upside down hulls. Fishermen have hung replicas of their boats from the ceilings to invite blessings and protection from the saints, but there are also murals to the mythical gods of the islands surrounding pictures of the Christ. In several churches, they even considered Jesus Christ the patron saint instead of leaving him the focus as Son of God. The statues are decorated with silk flowers because the natural version doesn’t last long in the Chiloean climate.

In the afternoon we walked through a national park and I learned that the entire island is sinking. As a result, the plant life has adapted to live underwater during the flood season. At first, they reminded me of dense desert plants, but when we entered the woods, I felt like I was walking through the Degaba System on Star Wars. The path was made up of logs that looked like drift wood and there were many wooden bridges built to help us cross large gnarly root systems. Moss, ferns, and palmera plants grew intertwined among the trees.

This trip also taught us the value of not parking a bus in the sand where it will inevitably get stuck. The guys ganged up to push it out and we were rewarded with another colección on the bus. This goodie bag was much better than the last one and I actually kept most of it for myself. Generally, I give most of my snacks away, but today we got Costa chocolate, and I have long since discovered that this brand of Chilean chocolate is really really good.

We attended another mass before dinner. A lot of the girls are still really upset about Maria Jesus and visiting all the empty churches this morning didn’t help. Even I could note the difference that the island superstitions made throughout the service, especially since the lesson was based on the views of San Francisco (whoever that is) rather than on the Bible.
Arroz y pollo won all the gringas ice cream after dinner. Simone had bet Ricardo that we’d be having chicken and rice for dinner and he didn’t believe her. He didn’t realize how predictable the food in Chile is, especially the food served to large groups. Almost always, you’ll start with chicken and rice, the next night is beef and mashed potatoes, and the third night features either pasta or fish and French fries. After that, your guess is as good as mine, but I plan to enjoy my ice cream.

Friday, October 31st
Touring the salmonera was an eye-opening experience. We had to wear yellow rubber boots, gloves, hairnets, face masks, and overclothes to preserve the sanitary conditions of the fish factory. Every room had its own soapy water trough to walk through and a hand washing station. Inside, we saw workers filleting, freezing, packing, and transporting pink salmon steaks. I can’t imagine a forty hour work week where all I did was cut off fish heads or pick out rib bones with tweezers, not to mention the damp, frozen environment. We also visited the fish food factory, but because of the noise, I couldn’t understand a thing.

Naturally, we had fresh fish for lunch. It was really delicious and cheap because it was caught in the bay not a kilometer away. I tried salmon, merluza, and congrio, but didn’t brave the shellfish because there was no one to tell me what things were, what was cooked, or what was safe. I also took part of my lunch money to the supermarket to buy myself fruit and some of the famous Chilolac yogurt which was alright, but nothing to brag about. I’m still amazed that these group trips ignore all fruits and vegetables for a week at a time. I for one start having withdrawals.

Our quick lunch followed by free time didn’t exactly turn out as planned. The bus broke down and we had to spend the afternoon in Ancud. On the bright side, we had time to visit the ice cream store where Ricardo made good on his bet. We couldn’t find a hand dip heladería so we had to make do with vanilla frosting flavored soft serve, but it was still worth the effort. The tasty merluza for dinner dashed Simone’s wager for a third night pasta dish. It’s too bad that I hadn’t made the deal because my guess of fish and French fries turned out to be right.

Saturday, November 1st
We toured three more churches today. They were so old we weren’t allowed to touch anything for fear that the ceiling would cave in on our heads. We took another boat and crossed the river to the island of Anchao. It was gorgeous. The ocean, islands, and Andes can all be seen in the same view. We’ve been so lucky with weather: pure sunshine in a place widely known for nonstop rain. We crossed paths with another tourist group bedecked with tennis shoes, camera bags, and fanny packs. I stopped one of these obviously American ladies to ask her, “De donde son?” (Where are you guys from). She looked at me in shock and then stammered, “Yo no hable español.” I quickly assured her that her lack of Spanish was no problem because I was an exchange student. Unfortunately, I forgot to switch back into English and her eyes grew even wider in panic. Oops. That shows you how natural this second language is becoming. I cleared up the confusion and even translated some of the group’s questions to our guide. It was great fun and practice for a possible future interpreter.

Lunch with interesting. The restaurant ran out of meat so a third of the kids satisfied their hunger with prepackaged ice cream.
I ordered chicken soup loaded with veggies, but the bowl appeared with a few kernels of corn and doused with cilantro. I never had cilantro before I came to Chile, but the little green herb has a nasty habit of initiating my gag reflex. After much explaining and a near tear experience, the waiter brought me a new bowl and the second edition was much better.

The afternoon included time for light reading and bargain shopping. Craft markets abounded. Wool hats, scarves, and sweaters are the most famous items, but the itchy wool didn’t attract my interest too much. I bought Katie a unicorn keychain and a sugar bowl for myself as a reminder of Chiloe. The outside is carved with a boat on the waves and an autumn leaf, and when I get the chance to sand the inside, it will hold my chai tea instead of sugar. It even came with a cute wooden spoon. I also bought myself some earrings. The top halves are woven like dream catchers with beaded dangles hanging below colored bold blue and silver. Don’t ask me why, but I feel more mature wearing them, and a bit more wild and crazy. Now I can be Chilena!

Sunday, November 2\textsuperscript{nd}

We return to Ancha to see the inside of the oldest church on the island. It was definitely worth the 15 \textit{luka} the boat ride and the travel time to see the intricate inlaid wood. The original engravings were blue and the restored sections were yellowish brown. The designs in the wood seemed like sunrays and sea waves, but pictures with flash were prohibited. We attended Mass on a whim because yesterday was the day of the dead when most Chileans visit the family graves. It was the best mass I’ve attended yet. I understood every word of the priest, the lesson was entirely biblical, and the music was heartfelt.

Afterwards, we traveled by bus to the extreme south of Chile as we watched “\textit{Corazon de Caballero}” (A Knights Tale). The countryside reminded me of West Virginia with rolling hills covered with evergreens and rocky ground. However, I was never able to gaze out over an island filled Pacific Ocean with an Andes backdrop on the way to grandma’s house for Thanksgiving.

For lunch, we were each given two \textit{luka} (2000 pesos) which is about three dollars to scavenge for ourselves in the little restaurant that lined the streets. \textit{Sandwich} was the meal of choice. Probably twice the size of their American counterpart, you can order a Chilean sandwich loaded with chicken, beef, or pork and with your choice of \textit{palta}, tomato, mayonnaise, and green beans. I now know never to order a hamburger in Chile. You will receive a thin round greasy white disk that they claim is meat and only measures two inches in diameter. This unappetizing morsel comes frozen in individual packets and makes school cafeteria food look like gourmet cooking. I would suggest \textit{Churrasco} or \textit{Barros Loco} instead. It’s not ground beef, but the steak is unquestionably real meat. This was my late lunch lesson at 4:30.

A \textit{lonka} is the chief of the Huilliches, a native tribe fighting for their traditional land rights. We were granted an interview and learned about the political struggles surrounding the city of Quellón. I guess they’re upset because \textit{gringos} now control the island of Chiloé rather than the native people. The \textit{lonka} didn’t know about the \textit{gringa} in the audience and there were more than a few chuckles. I didn’t worry too much because the rise of modernism and industrialization is not my fault.

When we arrived in Castro at 8:45, it was still bright outside. None of my schoolmates wanted to venture out jogging and I didn’t want to go out alone. Throughout the week, I had made a habit of jogging by myself before breakfast. It felt wonderful to be out in the crisp morning air with the sea breeze on my face. Unfortunately, I noticed a few shady characters already on the streets and realized that with the weekend coming, I shouldn’t go out on my own again. That night, the girls started traveling in packs wherever we went. Luckily, Nelson, the eighteen year old son of our hostel owner was in the mood for some exercise and we headed out towards the center. The first hill was a killer, but I wasn’t going to wimp out after asking for his company. My legs screamed as the incline kept going and going and going like the energizer bunny, but finally the streets leveled out and Nelson turned into a really good conversationalist. We talked of Chile, school, and life. He wants to go into the army or the \textit{carabineros} (Chilean police force) and has already spent a summer in training.
We also reached the end at the Pan American Highway which begins in Anchorage, Alaska, passes through 20 countries and ends in Quellón, Chiloe.

Monday, November 3rd
I started the morning early with a 6am jog. Nelson invited me to go before school, and I returned before the morning rush. I was able to shower, pack, and head down to the dining room while most of the girls were still wiping the sleep from their eyes. Every morning we breakfasted in the hostel dining room with warm bread, jam, tea, and either cheese or ham. Señor Parra, one of my teachers, introduced me to a new, seemingly bizarre, but tasty combination. By the end of the week, I was enjoying my sandwich of cheese and peach marmalade (one atop the other) just like a native Chilean.

We visited two forts and traveled around the bay on precarious roads. Lunch consisted of odds and ends from my pack and kuchen at a local pastry shop. Mine was “peaches and cream” and the best the shop had to offer, in my opinion. We all taste-tested the apple and the nut which reminded me of monkey bread with caramel and pecans on yellow cake.

The potato shop was out of the famous blue Chiloe spuds so we started for home. On the ferry crossing, I was standing at the rail when I overheard a man say, “Look, you can see dolphins.” Naturally, I turned to watch, but my attention was captured by his adorable British accent. It turned out he was the guide for a whole busload of British citizens, each fully equipped with the “tea and crumpet” dialect. We also met another gringo from Baltimore. Jota was definitely a hottie, or mino in the Chilean slang, and my sixteen year old companions were falling all over themselves for the tall twenty year old blond with crystal blue eyes. I took quite a few photos of the girls with their instant crush as the poor guy turned redder and redder by the instant.

The food court in Puerto Mont’s mall provided dinner. I chose Chinese and watched wide-eyed as a companion’s “taste” devoured a third of my meal, but the ice cream more than made up for it. I had tres leches in a waffle cone. I also bought Katie an orange and red posy candle, just because.

Tuesday, November 4th
The bus pulled into Curicó at 8:30 and we all gathered our bags, our souvenirs, and our dripping salmon sacks. I was just about to call Carola when I discovered my Brazilian chocolate melted all over my journal, novel, camera, cell phone, and knapsack. What a mess!

At home at last, I stashed all my dirty clothes in the hamper and prepared breakfast. Unfortunately, Carola saw me and invited me to eat in the salon with her friend, and there was no way I could eat my granola while my trip and I were the center of attention. Luckily, painting class beckoned and I finished my soggy granola in front of the computer. Thirty-four e-mails were waiting for me including one from Katie and one from Nelson. He sent me a poetic kiss and rose while calling me his queen of hearts. My girlfriends will love hearing about this!

Carola and I ate lunch on bandejas in her bedroom. Don’t ask me why we were using the TV trays instead of the table. I was just going with the flow, and actually, the quiet time for two worked to my advantage. For weeks, I’ve been worrying that there’s something wrong with me. I had been warned that my initial flight could easily mess up the normal pattern for my period, but this felt different. As my mother would say, I’m having womanly troubles, but my mother isn’t here. It was definitely interesting trying to
discuss things like periods and hormones with my host mother. To begin with, it’s a rather private issue to discuss with someone you don’t know all that well, and I was trying to do it tactfully in a foreign language. Sigh. We did manage despite my embarrassment and the language barrier and Carola has promised to get me an appointment with her gynecologist. Now I just have to wait and see what happens.

Afterwards, I laid out in the sun, chatted with Nicole, and downloaded all the Chiloe photos. I didn’t want to do too much today so I stopped and lazied about feeling a bit lonely. My old piano teacher, Mrs. Rodak, had sent me a Christmas CD while I was away and the soothing music helped raise my spirits, but I wanted a friend and waited most of the afternoon for Jacquelyn to return my call. I’m determined to visit her house this week and hopefully Kristin’s too.

Wednesday, November 5th

I talked myself out of jogging and climbed back into bed after getting ready this morning. I have to admit that I’m beat. When I did emerge, I entered the kitchen with a recipe to make homemade pancakes from scratch. Carola deemed them exícito and asked for seconds, but I wasn’t quite satisfied. I’ll have to play with the recipe to find out what’s missing.

I downloaded the Chiloe photos, finished filling in my postcards, and hiked to the center to drop them off at the post office. Carola decided that Noelle should come over for lunch and pushed until I promised twice to invite her, but as I suspected, my Brazilian friend was still sleeping at 11:30 when I called.

I bummed around with Jessie and Nicole in the afternoon. We watched the beginning of Nicole’s home video showing her parent’s wedding and the birth of the babies. I think I would have been in tears if it had been my family video. It was put together like a scrapbook and her aunt was doing the singing in the background. The music was so beautiful. We also watched the video of the Ohio District Conference Talent Show. It was weird seeing us back when we still had no idea what to expect, and only dreamed of a far off place called Chile.

I ended up not going to the Rotary meeting as I had planned. I was tired and wanted to spend time with the family before Carola and Teco left on their weekend getaway to Argentina, but in truth, I didn’t feel welcome at the meeting. Nicole didn’t go either. Someone told her that the exchange students shouldn’t come to every meeting because it’s too expensive for Rotary to feed us. I called Ernesto to make sure because I wanted to tell him about my trip to Chiloe and an idea to visit the Chilean chocolate factory, and he said that it would be fine. However, when we called again to find out if our blue jackets were required, his wife reiterated that we weren’t welcome. Oh well, it ended up for the best. I went with Carola to visit Buvi and then she took all the kids out for sandwiches. I discovered Barros Jarpa which is absolutely delicious. Picture warm gooey cheese melted over scraps of ham on a toasted bun, and the serving size was humongous. I ended up giving a fourth to both Matias and Agustin and still had plenty for myself. Next time, I’ll follow Carola’s example and get the half size (which is still bigger than a stacked sub sandwich!)

Thursday, November 6th

Happy Birthday Katie!

I did my best to be floja this morning and managed to stay in my PJs until 11:30 when I went jogging. One of these days I’m going to have to learn to sleep in, but the good news is that it has finally warmed up to the point I don’t need to wear a sweatshirt over my pajamas. I actually woke up too warm and had to shed layers.

I passed the morning creating a Chilean update, running errands, and sending Katie a Happy Birthday e-card. It’s a backup just in case the post office doesn’t come through. I don’t want my little sis to be disappointed on her special day. While I was in the center, I bought my toothbrush. It’s white and minty green, and leaves my teeth feeling sparkly clean. My next major purchase will have to be tennis shoes. I believe mine are wearing thin and I don’t want to damage my feet with all this great jogging. The roses are gorgeous in the Spanish Club where I run and the weather is nice warm sunny and perfect. The blossoms are pink, yellow, red,
white, and mixtures of the four, and they all seem fragrant. The perfumes hang in the air as I jog past.

Two and a half hours completed my French homework. I’m putting in extra effort to ward off forgetfulness and even asked the Belgians if I could speak with them in French. I just happened to see Emily, tired of being alone, but I found that vacations aren’t that great by yourself. I had to wait till a normal school day finished. I also decided that my pretty blue underwear and bra were good enough for a swimsuit and went sun bathing. After all, I needed to prepare myself a bit more for the scorching summer sun.

My newly opened bag of chocolate covered pretzels is great. I’m hiding in my room to enjoy the treat all for myself, and I feel really sneaky with a Grinch-like grin, but I’m sure my heart is still a good size.

Friday, November 7th

After four hours of waiting by the phone, my family still hadn’t called. I sat in bed, watching Gilmore Girls, Sabrina, and the pages of “Hija de la Fortuna” and trying not to think of car crashes, heart attacks, and other emergencies. I finally called it quits at 1:30 and turned off my overactive imagination. I have no idea what I’d do if something happened to my family, but I’m sure they’re fine.

I got up to check e-mail this morning and found out that the phones just hadn’t connected. My family had been trying to reach me for several hours. I answered my messages, was so exhausted that I headed back to bed for three more hours and didn’t emerge until one o’clock for lunch. Too bad I can’t sleep during the day. I lay in the dark and rested. Then I surrendered Tylenol.

Norma made the salmon for lunch, but my present kind of flopped. Carola and Teco were in Argentina, the boys wouldn’t eat it, and I didn’t feel well. My one accomplishment for the day was my new running shoes. The arch feels so weird on my foot which supports my opinion that the old pair was obviously past its prime.

eat it all to be polite. However, that was just the first course. Next came crêpes flambé and then vanilla ice cream with a wine sauce that reminded me of bread pudding; however, the alcohol was overwhelming in both recipes I couldn’t force myself to eat the crêpes and just fished the ice cream out of the sauce. Last, but not least, Maca brought out her famous tres leches cake. It was delicious as usual.

Afterwards, a bunch of the girls decided to walk all the way to Jessie’s and back to burn off some of those calories. I swear they will all be basket cases by the end of the year. The plan was to return and watch a movie in the living room, but I wimped out, headed home, and snacked on some really tasty wheat crackers that Carola bought for me. After all was said and done, we didn’t eat all that much despite the girls’ worries. I went to bed early because I was so exhausted, but I didn’t take in to account the effects of chocolate mousse. Oh well, I had to let Matias in around midnight anyway. One of these days, I hope he’ll remember his keys.
Saturday, November 8th

This morning we attended a cousin’s First Communion and then drove out to celebrate with lunch in the country. I spent some time talking to Scarlet, but she deflated my happy bubble. She told me that it bothers her when I try to talk to her in Spanish when we’re alone. She says I have to do more to support the exchange student instead of raising the standards in the eyes of the host parents. I honestly don’t want them to look bad because of me. That thought had never entered my mind. I just use the Spanish because it makes me happy, but when I said that I spent half an hour talking with Kristin’s parents during my morning jog, Scarlet turned frosty and told me that I have to stress the importance of relaxing in a comfortable native tongue instead of taking advantage of every Spanish-speaking opportunity. I guess that’s my overachiever aspect shining through again. I spent the evening cutting out recipes and watching American Dreams.

However, talking to Kristin’s parents really paid off because her mom gave me a helpful hint. If I want to swim in the club pool of the Estadio Español, I need to talk to Jacquelyn’s mom whose dad is on the committee. The pool opens in two weeks! I can hardly wait.

Sunday, November 9th

Carola and Teco arrived home this morning bearing gifts. I love the silver bracelet carved with star and moon silhouettes. There’s also a cute money pouch that will have to hold earrings or something because I already bought my monedera in El Sur. The third gift is a book that Carola really wants to read. I think there was a hidden motive there.

After mass, we attended a birthday party, and I tried empanadas de locos for the first time. It’s very similar to the pino variety, but contains a white shellfish instead of beef. I just wish they’d let me mix with the guests as I chose. Every time I integrated myself comfortably, someone would “suggest” that I’d get along in another group better and I’d have to move.

Emily came with me to share our first polo experience. Teco played well and won even with a scant hour of sleep. While we watched, we were entertained (well pestered really) by a very fresh family friend. He said he was in love with me and my sexy pointed tooth. Emily and I were both beautiful, but since she’s officially attached to Ben, I was the main target. Why didn’t I have boyfriend security when I needed it? The guy had to be in his 30s, but he kept petting and inviting us out for ice cream and dancing. I eventually traded seats with Emily to escape and he finally took the hint. At the finale, Emily and I helped hand out the trophies for the polo championship.

Today I wanted to cry. I realize that I’m still tired, but Scarlett’s comments still revolve like a wound in my mind and I wanted to talk with my family. Carola is a wonderful woman, but she will never be Mom and I can’t talk about my problems with her. First off, she doesn’t understand our cultural differences and she’s very closed minded and protective of her culture, friends, and family. That part I can understand; however, she also has a tendency to share everything with everyone. (Which is typical for Chileans.) I found out today that people I’m meeting for the first time already know about me. To be more specific, they already know about my eating habits because weight and body image is such an obsession and my personal life is common knowledge. It doesn’t help that I’ve lost weight without meaning to, and although Carola and some of my friends have expressed concern, the majority of Chileans assure me that I look better than ever. Luckily, I don’t agree with them and my goal is to gain 3 kilos by Christmas. It shouldn’t be too hard to gain six pounds, but I need to talk to Teco about letting me gain that weight in peace. His idea of “helpful and supportive” comments include beauties such as, “You look fatter to me. Did you gain weight?” Sigh. I just want to get healthy again and want to do it my own way in my own time.
I almost cried talking to my Ohio family after so long and especially after missing Thursday. I didn’t realize how much I was missing them until they were on the phone. Katie may have cried again tonight and I would gladly have joined her, but I had to put on a happy face until I retreated to my room.

Monday, November 10th

I took in all my notes for history because the teacher was checking up on our progress. He looks through every page as I showed him maps, population, and migration statistics and asked me calmly if I could translate them. Oops! I had done all my research in English.

Mom sent me the sweetest e-mail that put me in tears. I printed it to keep by my bed and cried every time I reread her words of encouragement. Luckily, the boys were eating an early lunch, and Carola and Teco had yet to arrive. I had a great peaceful cry to myself. Main point: she’s proud that I had the guts to go out and experience new world even though it’s hard. She had detected my hidden tears last night no matter how hard I tried to hide them. She made a connection with the lyrics from a LeeAnn Womack song, taking pride that I’m dancing in Chile and ending with “I love you. Stay strong.”

Mike wrote again and is definitely keeping himself in my good graces. His descriptions of a walk we could be taking together in the woods and the promise of a rain-checked picnic makes me long for home and his everyday friendship again. He hasn’t forgotten me and the feeling is mutual.

Maca’s birthday party materialized spur of the moment with less than four hours warning. Luckily, the French prof didn’t show up for class and I hurried home to shower, change into my own clothes, add some Chilean jewelry, and snack on lasagna. There was little left, but it was delicious, as usual. Carola saw me eating and couldn’t resist the last piece even though it doesn’t quite fit her mainly veggie diet. The digital camera was a big party hit and my friends amuse themselves both taking and posing for pictures. We munched on a lomita palta sandwiches and later chocolate manjar nut cake that was way too sweet.

I was in bed for all of ten minutes when Maxi’s voice thundered through the house, “Shelly! Sabrina is starting!” I couldn’t help grinning, ousted myself from the warm covers, and snuggled down with my Chilean brothers in the master bedroom to watch Sabrina turn her friends into zebras at Disney World. As the credits played, I tried to turn in, but Gundi begged me to stay for Sister Sister. I think the fact that Norma stopped bugging them to go to bed helped improve the value of my presence, but we were having a good time too. I did stay. After all, as Gundi pointed out. If I could stay up till 11pm in Ohio, I can do it in Chile too. Besides, I need a bit more practice with their tickle spots.

Tuesday, November 11th

You should have seen the weather in Curicó today. It started out with just a light spring rain, but then the fun really started. A big cloud rolled in bringing thunder, lightning, and lots of hail. Our backyard is one big puddle. The water poured off the roof in sheets, ignoring the spouting and even managed to find its way into the house by way of my bathroom skylight. Naturally, the skylight is located right above the toilet paper. Even the clothes hanging out to dry under the patio roof got soaked due to the intense wind, but the mother mourning dove and her chicks are perfectly safe in their nest.

Norma started her week off this afternoon. She has orders to stay in bed for the entire week with hopes that her back and nerves will heal. While she was taking a break, I worked hard throughout
the afternoon to renounce any sign of "floja-ness" in my personality. The history project is going well, and Carola helped me polish up my Spanish grammar. I also finished up the "please let me swim" letter to the Estadio Español and have my fingers crossed.

Wednesday, November 12th

There was a pop quiz in math. It took me awhile to catch on, but then the light bulbs started to flash. By the time I figured out which symbols were angles and guessed through the triangle vocabulary, I was having a blast. The problems challenged my right and left brain as I puzzled over the ifs and therefore to track down x, alpha, beta or the sum of all three. Unfortunately, I had only finished half of the test when it was time to leave for my extra Wednesday French class. I love my teacher and the speaking skills are really coming back. I think I float a little after each class. My friends think I'm really weird. It just took them awhile to notice.

Carola planted our herb garden today.

In the afternoon, I had the privilege of teaching Matias algebra and the tutor is back in business. If he doesn't pass this school year, and he's on the border line, he can't go to New Zealand. Therefore, I spent the evening helping him cram for the algebra test that he has to pass tomorrow. He presented me with a worksheet on eight different factoring styles and a blank stare. My oddness shone through as I lit up reviewing the equations and playing with the ones I had never seen before. I was amazed at how fast Matias caught on and made sure to praise his efforts. His only problem is lack of gumption because he's extremely intelligent. When we were halfway through, I got out a pack of chocolate donuts from my goodie stash. He was glowing. Come to think of it, I probably was too. It felt so good to be teaching again and the Spanish wasn't a barrier. Matias told Carola, “Wow! She's good.”

When I reached my room, I found what I assume is a thank you present on my bedside table. Trencito is a chocolate bar filled with mini M&Ms, and I savored the sweet goodness as I readied myself for sleep. Thank you, Carola.

Thursday, November 13th

Thanks to a philosophy exam, I got to sleep in after a late Rotary night. The extra rest came in handy as the history prof quizzed me on the economic conditions of the 1920s in the US and how they affected the world. Carsten also explained post-World War II Germany and the global aspect was fascinating. All the pieces flowed together.

I decided to be responsible and take care of myself with some much-needed downtime. No jogging today or tomorrow because my body needs to recuperate more than it needs to exercise. It's weird, but I think I still haven't adjusted to eating so late. Every night, I have to get up two or three times and I miss peaceful nights slumber. I'd just eat more for tea if it didn't contradict the culture. I'll just cross my fingers and hope that something changes.

I left school early because my class was working on their history projects and I had already finished mine, although I have to make the whole thing bigger and bolder. The extra time allowed for a quick change of clothes (I love my jeans!) before I headed to the plaza and our Chilean cooking lesson. Rotary had set up a class for us to learn how to make chilenitos, two bland crackers filled with manjar and covered in meringue. We did everything from kneading the dough, perforating the
crackers with a spiked mallet, and covering the sweet sandwiches (and ourselves) with sticky meringue. I drew designs on two of the cookies before I found out that our creations were destined for sale in the shop. The great thing about having a Rotarian as teacher and owner is that he took us to the storeroom where we taste tested the other varieties of sweets. Tío Roberto gave us souvenir visors and let us try cuchifliés, alfajores, and chocolate coconut candies, but the best part was still to come. He took us all to his house for an authentic Italian dinner. His wife had prepared homemade pasta and three different sauces: cream and ham (my favorite), pesto (a Belgian obsession), and a red marinara. This last one looked like spaghetti sauce, but surprisingly, I didn't like it. With our tummies full and very happy, we finished off with cherimoya, a Chilean fruit that reminds me of orange-pineapple-banana juice, and lemon meringue pie.

Nicole spent the night in my room. We made the bed and then talked until 12:30. It's both a blessing and a curse that we have each other to confide in, because our only opportunity to vent is among ourselves. Having reached the three month mark, the expected psychological depression is beginning to show itself in the complaints of our fellow exchange students. When Rotary told us about the emotional cycle during our orientation sessions, I was skeptical, but it's definitely a real thing. Now we just have to tough it out until we reach the next high plateau.

Friday, November 14th

Nicole came with me to school today. She wanted to visit a French class, but the teacher was in Santiago so she settled for the basic French school system. I was amazed at her philosophical skills. We were analyzing short stories in Castellano and I caught on to the animal symbolism, (lion = leader, monkey = trickster, owl = wise, snake = temptation, etc.) but she was thinking way outside the box. For her, the story was about how society blames natural destruction on big buildings when the people are at fault. Wow! That's deep.

We walked to Rivarolo to pick up our chilenitos which had hardened sufficiently overnight and were rewarded with empolvados. These are my favorite Chilean dulce (sugary pastry) thus far, made from two vanilla cookies sandwiched with manjar and covered in powdered sugar. We looked like snowmen when we finished, but it was worth it. They're not as sweet as most dulces which probably explains why I like them more. I shared my three chilenitos with the family, but Teco wasn't impressed. He wants to take me to his aunt's shop in Santiago, where the crackers are flat, the manjar is abundant, and you can choose with or without meringue.

Emily and I organized a Mexican feast with soft tacos, sopapillas, chicken fajitas, and taco treats. The gouda cheese made all the difference, but I definitely overestimated. Afterwards, we sat around listening to Christian music. Fabulous fun!

Saturday, November 15th

Happy three month anniversary!

I met a guy named Juan as I was jogging through the Estadio Español and he joined me for my last fifteen minutes. I have to learn that guys have no reservations about spur of the moment exercise and take my carefree invitations seriously. He recognized me, but I have no idea where I saw him before. Today's pancakes were better with more peanut butter and less syrup. I miss Aunt Jemima Butter Light. Even though it's not real maple, it's a million times better than the liquid sugar of Chile. I delivered Carola's and rushed out the door to talk with Jacquelyn's mom before she left. It looks like smooth sailing in the pool.

Nicole and Emily came over for lunch and then the polo game. You could tell how tired we were when we all reverted to English. I told Nicole all about Mike. Later, Jessie came over while I finished tweaking my history project, missing the others by a few minutes.

Sunday, November 16th

I made apple dumplings before heading out to watch the tennis tournament. Cold weather and rain put a damper on crowd participation and we never did get to see any of the boys play. I
was trying to read a bit because *Hija de la fortuna* is due on Friday and I still have 150 pages to go. It wouldn't be so bad if Carola didn't keep inviting friends over to visit me (or should I say her). Today it was four of Caro's friends and Jessie. I felt bad for my lack of enthusiasm when Jessie called to warn me, but I had planned on a few hours of downtime to finish my work and relax. I rushed through my dumpling which was perfectly warmed to melt my ice cream and then enjoyed Jessie’s company while Carola entertained Pancha and Co. They all wanted to try the *postre de manzanas*, but left a lot of the apple even though I served the dumplings in fourths. Chilean dieting shines through again.

**Apple Dumplings**  
*Postre de manzanas*

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{1}{4} \text{ c butter} & \quad * \text{ Place first hour ingredients in saucepan} \\
1 \text{ c sugar} & \quad \text{Heat until sugar is dissolved} \\
\frac{1}{2} \text{ t cinnamon} & \\
2 \text{ c water} & \quad * \text{ Mix together flour, salt, and baking powder} \\
2 \text{ c flour} & \quad \text{Cut in shortening} \\
1 \text{ t salt} & \quad \text{Stir in milk until dough is moistened} \\
2 \text{ t baking powder} & \quad * \text{ Divide pastry in 8 chunks} \\
\frac{3}{4} \text{ c shortening} & \quad \text{Roll into 6 inch circles} \\
\frac{1}{2} \text{ c milk} & \quad \text{(about \(\frac{1}{4}\) inch thick)} \\
8 \text{ large baking apples} & \quad \text{Wrap pastry around each apple, leaving hole on top} \\
\text{(peeled and cored)} & \quad \text{Place dumplings in 8x13 baking dish} \\
& \quad * \text{ Pour syrup over the dumplings, making sure to coat the pastry and fill the empty center} \\
& \quad * \text{Bake for 35min at 350º} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Mike and Laura both logged on to AOL today. It was our first “conversation” in three months and I was floating on clouds. Most of my friends are in college now. I understand that they’re busy with new classes, new friends, and new activities, but sometimes it hurts to know that I’m not a vital part of their lives anymore. Leaving the country really does put a strain on relationships. However, Mike and I set up a date for Thursday at 10am. He misses me enough to wake up early on his one day off. How sweet!

Carola and I cleared up a misunderstanding about what I should pay for and what was covered by the family. We both assumed that all food was the responsibility of the host family until she talked with the other host moms. The tears flowed as I tried to pay her back for the Belgian food. I was so upset that she would think me a rude ungrateful girl, but once again I was making mountains out of a mole hill. It was just a misunderstanding with no one to blame and no harm done. I just had to start paying for my own meals when it was a *gringa* initiated activity. She gave me lots of hugs and we talked for twenty minutes. She even brought me a blanket to keep the chill away as I talked to my family in the drafty kitchen.

Monday, November 17th

I turned in my history project, but the *gringa* was the only one on time and I had to carry my poster back home to wait until Thursday. The other kids may be done by then, but I have my doubts.

After school, I ate another delicious apple dumpling and then headed to the center in the hopes of wrapping up my Christmas shopping. The street vendors were out in force and I picked out five pairs of flashy Chilean earrings. The cute elephants are for Laura and Toria who may or may not have the courage to wear them. I bought Mom and her friends long dangly creations in different colors. I can just imagine them instigating a fun girl's night out. I know my new earrings make me feel wild and crazy.

Skipping back, I plucked two hollyhocks in the street and left a flower doll for Carola. I want us to be good friends without uncomfortable barriers. The shopping spree also included new toothpaste with a refreshing mint flavor and a floppy disk to save all my e-mails, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find *alfajor bonbons*. I must’ve asked in six different stores. Déjà vu is setting in from the last time I got ready to send a package. Why
can I never find thinks when I want them? Luckily, Scarlett says she can help me find them in a bulk food store. I’m so glad that we’re getting along again. Besides, if all else fails, there’s always Santiago on Wednesday.

Tuesday, November 18th
Wow. I am beat. I spent most of the day getting on and off the e-mail trying to get my records for the doctor tomorrow. Poor dad had the hard part though. He had to contact Betsy, prove power of attorney, pick up the papers, scan them through the computer, and fax them when scanning failed. My dad’s a hero, and all that between work and teaching his class. Between stressful medical updates, I ended up using computers at school, at Scarlett’s, and at home. I also had to check in with Miami to figure out the timeline for all my deadlines and finish my Chilean update. Downtime was spent readying the Christmas package with personal messages and pretty paper. Carbonato, chicken soup with carrots and potatoes, followed by my last apple dumpling put a sweet ending to my day.

The other big news involves my new exchange sister from New Zealand. Jen will be arriving the 11th of January and I think we might be twins separated at birth (if you ignore the appearance factor). We both enjoy writing stories, singing Christmas carols, and cooking. Her family owns a bed and breakfast and her specialty is scones. I can’t wait to try them. She also claims to be the guru of Disney music, but I have my doubts. We both lean toward spontaneity both in laughter and actions and she’s admitted that if she hasn’t returned from a short walk in half an hour, she’s probably found a sweet shop. She’s plotting to bring a ton of “the world’s best chocolate” from the local factory to share with new friends and family. Her only stated dislike was boiled potatoes which she secretly feeds to her dog, and our only major difference is her insatiable love of Rugby. I think that we’re going to have a great time together. She doesn’t know much Spanish. In fact, she’s never had a class, but I’m looking forward to helping her learn. I have a feeling that the first few months will be filled with Spanish sentences repeated in English because the last thing I want is to become a crutch that cripples her. Using the bare minimum of English will be my goal.

Wednesday, November 19th
We left for Santiago in train and encountered Santa Claus upon arrival. The poor guy had to be miserable wearing the whole suit and beard in the 90° heat. We took a crazy micro (taxi) toward Patronato, the shopping district, and then trekked the remaining distance to find lapiz lazuli. I found Katie a matching necklace. Carola is buying gifts for the boys: sweatshirts, swim trunks, jackets, etc., and this is where money trouble started. Her credit card wouldn't go through and I had to lend her 20 luka. Unfortunately, I then found myself 10 luka short at the doctors, but by then, she had withdrawn funds to lend me. We also stopped at Lider to buy tennis shoes. I found summer sandals for myself, but bon-o-bon alfajores are still elusive. Carola suggested another brand. I hope they’re good.

The doctor's visit went well. No problems just as suspected. The doctor suggested Chilean birth control, which is 1/5 the price and took the time to explain exactly what my body was doing. I learned more about gynecology in Spanish than Betsy had explained back home.

Thursday, November 20th
The rumor mill of Curicó is at work again. I had to laugh. Emily came up to me yesterday with concern etched on her face. Someone at school had told her that I had a serious allergic reaction and had gone to Santiago because I was dying. Don’t ask me how her schoolmates came up with that story because my family and two or three exchange students are the only ones I told about my trip to Santiago. I assured her that I was fine and we had a nice chat. The small town atmosphere is really strange!

I skipped the history test and escaped home to keep my IM date with Mike.

After school, I went with Maca and Carola to visit the Claudio Soler cherry factory. On the way, we picked up Jacquelyn,
Friday, November 21st

I tackled my first test in Castellano and I think I did well. The teacher was very amazed that I read the entire novel and braved the exam for *Hija de la fortuna*. He said that I should be an example for the entire class, most of whom were still cramming over the summary, especially considering that I’m only an exchange student.

“Sweating to the Oldies” has some good competition. I went with Carola to Tia Andrea’s house for my first Chilean aerobics class. They hired an instructor to give private lessons three times a week. Because I’m a *gringa*, I get a deal and can pay 1000 pesos for each class instead of the whole package. Most students just lose money on the classes they miss. We did a lot of Latin style dance and by the end, even I was sweating. I had to learn how to roll my hips with finesse, but I think that there’s hope for me yet!

The afternoon was a stressful mess. I planned to meet Kristin at UniMarc to look up meal prices for the Thanksgiving feast that we’re trying to organize, but when I arrived she had Scarlett and Lindsey in tow. I don't know what’s gotten into Scarlett, but she spent the whole time complaining about how we were doing things and making “suggestions.” Carola says that she just wants to give the orders because she's grown used to being the *jefa* and she likes being in charge. Most of the exchange students flock to her because she's fun and only wants to speak English. Unfortunately, I've noticed that she also tries to convince the others that they are as unhappy as she is (or was). I ended up checking prices on my own and then returning home to cry. Although Carola doesn't provide the good comforting hug of home, she did help me talk through things, and I wiped my tears away ready to face Thanksgiving with a fresh start.

Maxi, Gundi, and I snuggled down for another Sabrina and Sister Sister night. Caro called from my house to talk to her parents, but they had already gone out for dinner so she handed the phone to my sister. I was torn between talking to Katie on the phone and the boys who were calling me back for our date. The little ones won in the end, but I hung up the phone with regret.

Saturday, November 22nd

They filled the Estadio Español swimming pool today. I spent the afternoon writing the annual Alpeter Christmas letter which was a strange experience considering the summer-like weather, watching TV, calling everyone to confirm our Thanksgiving plans, and starting some long-delayed letters to my grandparents.

Carola really means well, but I hope that she’ll soon learn that I’m not her daughter and don't need someone to entertain me 24/7. She doesn't like it if I just want to stay home. So after listening politely to all the things we exchange student should or should not be doing, she arranged for me to go visit Noelle. It was nice. Naomi had come up from Talca and we chatted and had tea. They insisted that I eat because they needed to fatten me up, but then sat back to watch and drink their coffee. What a double standard!

When I came home to crash, Carola gave me two options: go with the *gringas* to the disco or with Pia to the goodbye BBQ for the senior class. I decided to make the effort with my Chilean friends and headed for the campo. The stars were gorgeous and extremely bright, especially when the electricity went out. They had *chicha*, almost wine, but sweeter, and the makings for *piscocola* and *piscosour*. I tried both and decided that I could grow to like the drinks, but at the moment I don't want to develop a habit that is known to spiral out of control. Most of the guys were
wasted after only an hour and although it loosened their tongues for conversation, it also increased their freshness. I actually had to tell one guy to leave and stop talking to me. Telling him that I was faithful to my boyfriend back home, which was only half a lie, helped fuel his disinterest too. While the alcohol disappeared, the English spouted out. It was funny listening to such a mutilated version of my native language. The girls were nice and warned me which guys to avoid. I tried talking with them, but like I told Carola, they already have their tight group of friends, and I'm just not included.

Contradiction: the host parents criticize us for spending too much time with exchange students, but they always invite the gringa friends first.

Sunday, November 23rd
I started playing ping-pong with the boys today after jumping into bed to watch the new “Parent Trap.” I was decked out in skirt and Chilean jewelry on a whim, but I think I fit right into their pajama party.

I had lunch with Nicole and her family, and we spent the afternoon sunbathing, talking, and listening to Phil Collins. She also lent me her learn to speak French CDs. She has every language under the sun (one hundred and one to be exact). Her parents drove us to the meeting at Ernesto's where we finalized Thanksgiving plans, Punta Arenas details, and the pros and cons of Easter Island. Ernesto also asked me to speak at a meeting for next year's Chilean outbound exchange students tomorrow. I think I'm slowly but surely turning myself into a jefa, and also found myself with the responsibility of buying all the bus tickets for our trip to the Santiago airport.

I snacked for dinner on tortilla, bread baked in the ashes, and paltas. I had to munch unobtrusively as I talked with my family. They shocked me by announcing that my English is deteriorating. It's not awful, but definitely un-Shelly-like in the spelling and grammar department. My excuse is that I don't proofread the e-mails because I'm in a hurry, but it still hit me hard and I was a bit disappointed. The conversation lingered in my struggle to find more things to tell them about my life because the last thing they wanted to do was hang up. It was so sweet and I resigned myself to talk all night long if they wanted even if I had to start commenting on the state of my toenails. At times it was hard to talk because Carola or Matias was in the kitchen and I had to be mindful of what I was saying.
already taken it with another class so I had a separate exam, which was quite a bit harder. I hope I was up to the challenge!

Finally, I finished and hurried home to open my Christmas package. I was really excited. Lyndsey and Nicole arrived just in time to share my joy. I love my family! No wonder the shipping cost $106. I found Bisquick, cornmeal, pancake mix, hot chocolate, oatmeal, starbursts, and licorice in bulk sizes, a Christmas cantata CD, which we listened to immediately, cookie cutters, and a plethora of brightly wrapped gifts from my loving family. Even my puppy sent me a present. So much stuff! And this is only half the goodies! The glow must have illuminated my room. I was so happy. My family will never change, always going above and beyond the call of duty. I told them not to send much, their love was enough, or maybe a few small things, and of course they spent a fortune airmailing bulk food. I just shake my head and tease a bit, but their unreserved generosity is part of what I love most about them. They are good people to the core and that beauty shone ever more brightly contrasted with my host family's attitude. Carola didn't even want to help pay her part for the Thanksgiving dinner. I guess they missed the point behind the holiday.

Putting negative thoughts aside, Thanksgiving went wonderfully. We celebrated the holiday a little early because tomorrow everyone is heading south for a weeklong Rotary adventure. The big feast was Kristin’s (California) idea, but my natural leadership skills landed me with most of the responsibility and planning. Let’s just say that organizing thirteen families to get together at one time in one location for dinner is not the easiest task in the world, but after a lot of hard work and a few frustrated tears, everything was perfect.

We gathered outdoors in Noelle’s (Brazil) family patio. Noelle’s host mom offered their home because in her opinion the Estadio Español was too damp, dim, and muggy for an enjoyable party, besides we could heat up all the food in her kitchen. She borrowed tables, chairs, plateware, and candelabras from the Italian Club and created a very impressive and special atmosphere. It was a starlit night and the candles twinkled over the white tablecloths. The turkey, ham, and mashed potatoes were perfect, but the sides were more fun and interesting. Jessie (Ohio) smuggled butter and salt out of her house in a backpack for the corn which was supposed to be served hot in the American style. However, before she realized their intent, the Chileans emptied a whole bag of mayonnaise all over the yellow veggies. We had to bite our tongues to keep from laughing. Jacqueline made delicious green bean casserole that had a distinct flavor of fresh beans and a thick mushroomy consistency after being baked in the gas oven. Lyndsey had never attempted stuffing before, but it turned out rather well.... we think. None of us knew exactly what it was supposed to look or taste like, but the Chileans liked it. It was basically chicken flavored croutons with a little spice. However, my favorite treat was the pure de manazanas (homemade applesauce) that Noelle’s host mom made from scratch. I have to visit her one day as she makes it because delicious doesn’t begin to describe the taste. Besides, the recipe sounds really easy. The pumpkin pies were either a big flop or a huge success. I guess it’s such a distinct flavor that you can love it or hate it, but there’s no middle ground. We cut little pieces so that everyone could try, but we exchange students had three or four helpings to satisfy our Thanksgiving expectations. Unfortunately, there was no cool whip to top it off, but sweetened cream made a good substitute.

I was called on to give a spur of the moment explanation of this gringo holiday and then Kristen gave thanks to God for our feast, our host families, and our new friends. She
expressed (in English) how much we had come to mean to her and that from this moment on, we too are a family. Several other speeches of gratitude followed especially those of Noelle and Scarlett (Australia) who will be leaving us soon since their exchange revolves around the academic year in the Southern hemisphere. They arrived in March with the beginning of classes and now that classes are ending, they’ll be going home. It seems strange to me because I’m used to the academic year running from September to June with Christmas right in the middle, but I guess having summer vacation coincide with the Christmas holidays is pretty handy too. It sure would make visiting relatives a lot easier.

I spent much of the evening helping Maxi study for his history test. He had forgotten all his materials so Carola had to call a friend and take hasty notes while finishing up the turkey and gravy. Maxi decided that he liked my help best so we were memorizing all the different products you can make from a cow or a field of wheat. Then during dinner, another mother produced two more sheets of notes that he had to study, “right now.” Between bites of mashed potato and green beans, I learned all about the animals of the Chilean mountains and what a lighthouse does for the boats at sea. He was adorable and basking in the attention of all my table mates. I ended up in bed around 1am in typical Chilean fashion.

Note: Often I feel like a financial burden instead of an adopted daughter to Carola. She's frequently mentions how much it costs for Caro in Ohio, sending Matias to New Zealand, Teco’s polo equipment, and the boys’ tennis passion. I feel guilty even mentioning that I’m out of cereal let alone trying to explain why she should share the cost of Thanksgiving with the other parents. A chill enters the air whenever money comes up in the conversation, and yet they constantly pass money to the boys for junk food, pop, and tennis attire. I just have to accept that I'll never be their daughter, and although this miserly tendency pains me, on other occasions, they’ve surprised me with their generosity. Carola and I shopped for dried fruit to take hiking in Punta Arenas and she threw in a bonbon alfajor just because she knew I liked them. I sent her a thank you e-card before bed. Hopefully, it'll make her feel warm and special, which is its major purpose, and relieve any rumpled feeling she has over the six luka for pies. She brought it up in public, not me, and ended up sharing the costs after all. I was grateful to be leaving tomorrow.

Wednesday, November 26th

Floja defined my morning as I skipped classes to finish packing, make my first Chilean biscuit, and write home. Noelle’s host mom brought over some of her leftover pure de manzanas, perfecting my early lunch.

We bused to Santiago and the airport where they had stacked suitcases in the shape of a giant Christmas tree. Dunkin donuts attracted many exchange students, and I found the perfect picture book of Chile in the gift shop. Most of the books and calendars that I’ve found contain beautiful pictures, but I don’t recognize any of the scenes. Finally, Chile portrayed as I know it.

In the plane, we were served once with a mini cheese croissant, a turkey sandwich, and a cream puff. An hour later, our mushroom pasta with mil hojas dessert, the manjar replaced with butterscotch pudding, tempted our already satisfied appetites. The flight attendants even offered us wine with our meal.

Nicole had the best luck and sat next to Rafa. He is an eclectic writer born in Spain who now lives in Columbia. His morning begins at 4am to use the Internet. At 7am, he works with his animal friends, at 8am he gives a radio show, and at 11am he goes into town to visit friends or teach. He has contacts all over the world, loves to travel, and thrives on life. He writes on a plethora of subjects including cooking, health, architecture, chemistry, and bullfighting. He even signed a copy of his cookbook for Nicole. We chatted for the whole flight and he gave us the name of a seafood dish that we have to try in Punta Arenas: centolla.
We split up into two different hostels (family owned bed and breakfasts) for the night. Ours has cheap chandeliers with flower-child colors and it’s located within walking distance of the Strait of Magellan. The water is definitely glacier cold.

Thursday, November 27th
After breakfast, I walked two blocks to reach the Strait of Magellan. The occasional snowflake floated through the air as I combed the beach for pretty shells. It was a great beginning to Thanksgiving as I imagined the South Carolina Atlantic Ocean instead of the Patagonian Pacific lapping at my feet.

We posed with Santa in the Zona Franca and I bought food coloring so that I’m ready to make Christmas cookies. Later, we kissed the famous patagonian foot in the plaza so that we’d be fated to return, conducted a photo shoot of the city from a birds eye view, and walked through a bunch of really cool topiaries in the cemetery. I also found some good pinecones to add to my collection.

The *penguinera* was impressive. We crossed the boardwalk wearing hats, gloves, scarves, and many layers. The brisk gusts helped me fly along and I had to plant my feet and lean into the wind to head the other way. Penguins were out in abundance, especially along the coast. You could see them swimming and playing with their friends. Unfortunately, we didn’t get a chance to pet them. The best I could do was hug the wooden statue in a craft shop. The countryside reminded me of the American West. The old knotted trees could surround the Grand Canyon and the prairie grass would fit in well in Texas. Huge woolly sheep and big woolly birds ranged free.

Dinner was *exícto*. Nicole, Jessie, Naomi, and I abandoned the other exchange students to accompany the counselors who chose local seafood over pizza and we won out. While the pizza consisted of ketchup sauce, I had my very first *ostiones parmigiano* (scallops topped with Parmesan cheese) and tasted Nicole’s *chupe de centolla* (king crab baked with cream, cheese, and breadcrumbs) which may have been better than my scallops, but it was a close race. Our price tag was a little larger, but one thing I’ve learned from my parents is that there are some things in life worth paying for. *Costanuss* chocolate with almonds is very good for dessert.

Friday, November 28th
An early wake-up call and a thorough search for Megan's lost wallet started the day. The hostel owner was very nice and offered to call her parents long-distance to cancel the credit cards. We spent three hours in the bus to arrive in Puerto Natales. Most slept, but it was a good time to think, pray, and enjoy the view. My stream of consciousness was working overtime. Snowcapped mountains, glacier waters, and stunted trees with wind dried branches.

Puerto Natales is basically populated by tourists. We awed over the coastline, perused the craft shops, frolicked on the playground, and plopped in the den to chat. Then we took our first shower in three days which felt really good and bought snacks for the hike. I swear that no one could eat that much on top of breakfast lunch and dinner, but the shoppers would not be deterred from their purchases.
Saturday, November 29th

This morning I woke to Catherine's alarm watch at 6:15. I got dressed and climbed back into bed. I figured someone else could be responsible and make sure everyone had dressed, packed, and breakfasted on time. Wrong! I woke an hour later and cheerfully greeted my roommates, “Forty minutes till bus time.” After breakfast, I realized that there still wasn’t anyone up and made the rounds to rouse my slumbering friends, “Twenty minutes.” At nine, I searched out the guide to find out where the bus was. He was still in bed too, nursing a hangover, just like the Belgians.

Chile is beautiful! *La cueva de miladon* reminded me of Mohican State Park, but the mistletoe, pine trees, and open prairie land contrasted sharply. To be honest, the prairie inspired visions of African elephants and giraffes. The water is unbelievably blue and the mountain peaks can steal your breath. We saw ñandú (relatives of the ostrich family), conejos (jackrabbits), and alpacas (miniature llama cousins). Although we were sweating in the unusually warm sunny weather, the site of Lago Grey’s blue glaciers was worth the three hour hike. The clear blue color was amazing and we partook of the traditional whiskey shot cooled with glacier ice. I walked along the rocky shoreline and chose a few smooth souvenirs to take home from Patagonia.

Deciding who would sleep in tents and who would slumber inside the refuge was a small battle in itself. No one wanted to miss the chance to rough it, but the tables turned as it started to rain. I was one of the eight lucky volunteers who found themselves nice and toasty in the warm bunk beds. I love camping and tents would have been fun, but cold, and I’m really looking forward to a good sleep.

Sunday, November 30th

The morning started off with the best bread I’ve eaten yet in Chile. A little old man kneads it fresh every day and topped with butter, it would be an easy addiction. I still can’t believe how great it is to have fresh baked bread in the morning.

Thus, we were up and breakfasted with nowhere to go and nothing to do. The rainy weather kept us indoors and no Rotary events were scheduled until after noon. To make matters worse, the staff had already taken our blankets, there was no heat, rain beat against the windows, and shoes were prohibited, but we made do sharing coats, towels, and the one blanket we did manage to scavenge. We laid around in our bunk beds, trying to ignore the chill, and chatting until lunch. *Stroganoff de Ave*: not only did I get the name, but I asked for the recipe too. I think Mom will love it as an enchilada sauce.

Next we packed extra food, a change of clothes, water, and necessary toiletries in backpacks and locked the suitcases in the vans. No one had mentioned backpacking before and many of us were unprepared. Luckily, we had great weather and sunshine. Soon the sweat began to soak through our clothes and hair. We were huffing, puffing, and shedding layers like crazy. The insistence on hats, coats, and gloves seemed ludicrous and I even used a handy bush to take off the running tights I had been advised to don under my jeans.

The view was awesome, giving my camera a work out similar to my own. Every turn brought another breathtaking view of rushing rivers, cascades, mountains, and rolling valleys. After two hours, we arrived at the refuge “El Chileno” and the camping situation was reversed. Many who fought the first day to sleep in tents now regretted their decision. I ended up on the third level of bunk bed tower right next to the fire, warm and toasty.
Later, a few of us braved the second optional hike to El base del torres (The base of the towers). The hike began in pristine woods with an infusion of green which made me feel like I was surrounded by sound, scent, and sight of life. As the earthen path transformed into rock, our ascent began. We were climbing up more than forward, and shortly afterwards, the sleet began. Our hands froze and the final leg challenged our spirits as we climbed hand over foot up a steep pile of stones. Sleet poured down and the gusty winds threatened to blow us off the cliff face. We were cold, wet, and frozen, but the view at the crest was well worth it. Four snowy peaks challenged the world with their presence and we had conquered the obstacles that tried to keep us away.

Monday, December 1st
Today was an easier walk, but our guide intentionally misinformed us about how long it would take. I think he was trying to keep up morale. Four hours of trekking brought us to Los Cuernos del Paine and lunch. Note: most of the Rotary exchange students here in Chile do not like and will not eat fish, but they were happy to supplement their meal with cookies.

Blisters and chaffing began making their appearances, and when you add in the exhaustion factor, I must admit that the bicolored mountain didn’t seem so impressive. However, the beach view below was incredible and I brought back a few pebbles as souvenirs. The rumored boat did not appear to take us back to camp and we started out again on foot.

In our down time, we did a lot of talking (mostly in English because we were so tired) and fooling around. It was fun getting to know some of the others better. For me it was Kristin (California). We had worked together on the Thanksgiving feast, but hadn’t really talked. On the trail, our petite stature matched our strides and I helped her learn how to stretch sore muscles and added her to my list of hair to French braid. The Belgians guys are still inseparable. You can see them munching Fruitloops during every break, but after a late night birthday drinking party, they’re in a little Rotary trouble. Kyla (Washington) and Lyndsey (Canada) also discovered that they have kindred spirits. They’re both sixteen and bundles of energy, finishing an entire rendition of 100 bottles of leche (Chilean milk) on the wall without pause and chattering nonstop the entire trip.

Later in the afternoon, the group split into smaller teams so that those who needed to rest could stick together and the others could move on at their own pace. Susan, Taylor, and I made a team on the way back and only got a little lost. It’s strange that the paths are not marked like in the US. We talked quite a bit on the trail, changing positions so that the speaker was always in the back. Otherwise, it was impossible to hear each other. By the time we reached the camp, we had to prop our eyes open for dinner and then loaded the vans for Puerto Natales. I found that Taylor’s shoulder is the perfect height for dozing.
Tuesday, December 2nd

The next morning the sore muscles were quite evident, especially as the non-sporty types tried to get out of bed. There were a lot of grumbles, groans, and hobbles before breakfast. Everyone is tired and grateful for a nice, relaxing return trip. We window shopped and had lunch in Puerto Natales before heading to the airport. The *once* they served us on the plane was really good. They had square sandwiches made from an olive bread, at least I think it was olive, filled with turkey and lettuce followed by a pastry tart. The flight attendant spoke perfect English after studying at Stanford. I was impressed.

I ended up not buying presents for my host family. It all just seems like junk and I know that the boys will be happy with normal chocolate. I did find a penguin for Laura and Noelle, and found a cute figurine which has no intended purpose.

Since we got back so late, Jessie and I stayed with Carrie and her host parents in Santiago for the night. It’s always neat to stay with a new family and experience another way of life. Carrie’s house seems much more American. Both of her host parents work and they have all the modern amenities including central heating. It was heavenly.

The Christmas lights are on in Santiago.

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Wednesday, December 3rd

Carrie’s host parents had to work early so Jessie and I were up before dawn to catch a ride to the subway station. We breakfasted on good thick bread and fruit cake and then took the subway to the train station. Christmas carols filled the air, helping to pass the three hour wait. Note: they shouldn't be allowed to play “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” this year. It almost made me cry.

A second package from home was waiting for me. Lindsey made me open it before lunch because she was so excited. The wreath the Mom made Carola looks gorgeous and I think Dad’s nativity scene cut outs will be perfect for my Chilean relatives. The boys’ eyes lit up when they saw their names on a few packages. I gave them each a bit of Hershey's mixed chocolates and they liked all the flavors except the dark.

For myself, I discovered that chai tea is still as delicious as I remember, although Teco doesn't like it, and “White Christmas” looks so tantalizing in its little white box. I’m so glad that Mom thought to send it down. It just wouldn’t be Christmas without watching that old classic. I checked the TV guide and they don't seem to show Christmas specials in Chile. That seems so odd.

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Thursday, December 4th

There are no classes in the last days of school. Kids come to see their final grades and then they go home. Lucky for me because I read my e-mail in the library and had to escape to cry. Grandpa went into the hospital yesterday with fluid around the heart. He's coming home at the end of the week, but social services no longer consider him a capable caregiver. Mom’s really upset to realize that she can't and doesn't want to look after Grandma, which means her mom has to enter a nursing home. She went down to South Carolina this morning to be supportive and give herself some peace. Grandpa will probably move in with Aunt Grace in Florida or with us. It hit hard that I had just missed the last Thanksgiving and family reunion at Grandma and Grandpa’s house. To make things worse, when I got home, I found Teresa, the *nana*, going through my drawers. So much for privacy! This invasion was the last straw that unleashed the hysterics and I sobbed into the new patio cushions.

Later, I made corn bread to take to Noelle’s school *despedida*, but failed to realize that the different brand requires a different recipe. Naturally, it's not the greatest, but Matias sweetly lied and told me how good it was before leaving his “taste” in the living
room. On the other hand, Maxi and my friends liked it without reservation. Pop and potato chips were the only other snacks for the goodbye party.

Friday, December 5th
Forget Chilean taste buds. My cornbread was great for breakfast!
It was a lazy day. I went into school for French class to borrow a book for summer and received my grade. My teacher even made a special note of my efforts in the class records.
Mom sent along a book in my last package and I’m making good progress. In fact, I hate to put it down. It felt good to read and relax in the sun. The English words were practically therapeutic. I also took some time to work on my tan, finished a letter to my grandma, and made banana bread with two very ripe bananas. I had to run across the street for a cup of sugar, just like in the stories. An episode of Gilmore Girls lasted just as long as the baking timer and then Nicole and Trini (Caro’s friends) came to visit. They were surprised that Carola wasn’t home. When Noelle, Nicole (my friend), and Alé joined the group, we made no-bake cookies and looked at the Patagonia photos.

Saturday, December 6th
After a plethora of phone calls, I found that Estadio Español is open to me anytime before 2pm without a carnét. There aren’t any lifeguards on duty, but I can take responsibility for myself and enjoy the water. It’s still pretty chilly, but feels wonderful. My swimming muscles are definitely out of shape.
Dad and Katie called from Ohio and then Mom followed suit from Florida. Things seem better. I talked to both Grandma and Grandpa who’s weak, but in good spirits. Mom is still noticeably stressed, which is only to be expected.
It was a bit lonely. Carola didn’t want help with her blackberry jam conservation and none of my friends were home. I finished the Patagonia pictures, read a bit, worked on Mom’s scarf, and settled in to watch “Toy Story” with Gundi. Berta dropped in to visit and hand out another tasty chocolate, Sahne-nuss.
The Chilean graduation ceremony, la licenciatura, is beautiful. Because of the small class size, the professors make personal comments for each graduate and at the end, the first-graders give each graduate a teddy bear, taking the seniors’ places in the school. That started the tears. Carola and Teco received Caro's diploma and medal. I heard, “How sad that Caro's not here,” a million times. The ceremony didn't start until 9pm and then we “stopped by” Pancha’s graduation party and stayed for a few hours. She wore a picture of Caro as a tribute and read a reflection letter from her friend to the crowd. Afterwards, we headed to Nicole’s for dinner. It was close to 1am, but she had great dance music playing on the patio and the open air environment took away the bother of smoke and volume. It was mostly the young people dancing, but Teco and Carola joined in to groove as well.

Sunday, December 7th
Believe it or not, I managed to stay in bed until 10:30 this morning, but then again, the 3:30 bedtime probably helped. We headed out to the Cordillera to have lunch with Maxi’s scout troop in the mountains. At the picnic, I learned that palta and rice make a very tasty combination in a side dish and that Delicias, a local bakery, isn’t the epitome of postre. The pi de limon was nothing more than flavored sugar and pales considerably compared to a homemade lemon meringue pie. Carola was beat so I did the dishes and organized the kitchen before napping myself. Someday, I’ll learn to sleep in the daytime, but two hours of silence in the dark was relaxing in itself.
I met Jessie as we walked toward Noel's armed with tomatoes for her despedida. The goodbye party was a big success. Brad and Taylor came down from Santiago and we all gathered in the kitchen to make lomitas. It was quite a commotion peeling tomatoes Chilean style, smashing palta, chopping carrots, and avoiding the hot peppers. The sandwiches were good enough to require seconds and later we had the best fresh strawberries. I was surprised and disappointed with all the English, especially since Noelle doesn't speak it. Simone, Taylor, and I were the only sticklers because even Noelle's host sister, Pia, joined the gringas in their chatting. We snacked, talked, danced, and listened to music late into the night until Susan's brother picked the five of us up in a three-person pickup. That's when I found out that Carola, Teco, and los niños had gone to Santiago to see a polo game after I left for the party. It was quite a whim if they couldn't even tell me about it.

This weekend, I wonder for the first time if being an exchange student was worth missing Christmas. I'm not suffering from depression, but deep down I miss my family every day. I love them so much and yearn to be with them, but I also recognize how valuable this opportunity is. Even though it's a bit rough right now, I'm confident that in the end I will look back and clearly see how much I gained in my year abroad. I just hope I can take advantage of this summer to use my Spanish and improve my speaking skills by leaps and bounds. I don't want to be submerged in English or secluded alone. Time will tell. I can't imagine how I'll fill my days without housework and chores, but Nicole assures me that what seems like an empty summer will pass in a blur and in March, we'll wonder where the time went.

Side note: I'm really tired of hearing everyone complain about their weight. The worst part of each exchange is that these girls are going to need psychologists when they get home. They are possessed with scales and diet plans. Most have started taking the centers out of the bread like Chilean women do because it's the inner dough that's fattening. They're extremely self-conscious and no longer feel comfortable with their bodies.

Maybe it's worse for me because I had the opposite problem by losing weight and am actually trying to gain a few pounds. It's the only thing I haven't shared with Mom about my exchange. I don't want her to worry, especially since I realized my weight loss and took measures to fix it. Hopefully, by the time I return, I'll be back to my normal weight. The problem is that I'm really not hungry. Losing weight or watching my girlish figure is not an issue.

Monday, December 8th

Today was Scarlett's formal goodbye party. She doesn't really go home until the 6th of January, but with all the get togethers and traveling that will take place over the holiday season, her host family thought it best to have a despedida now. The house was packed. I hope that after a year I will have as many friends, Chilean and otherwise, who love me so much. She opened gifts under the beautiful Christmas tree as we mingled and snacked instead of sitting down for a meal. The highlights included mini pizzas and palta macaroni. Maca was afraid that no one would eat the pasta, but it disappeared first thing. They also served Scarlett's favorite dessert: torta de tres leches. I had two pieces with ice cream and if my mom does come to visit me in Chile, I will definitely be requesting this dessert.

There seems to be a lot of exchange student shifting all of a sudden. Scarlett’s leaving and we now have a new exchange
student in Curicó. Jana from Germany moved in with Juliet’s old family because Juliet has been sent home. As for Noelle, she couldn't leave after all. Her visa expired a month ago and she's in a pickle with the international police.

Tuesday, December 9th
This morning, I was walking down the road with Nicole when I had an epiphany. Suddenly, it hit me that I was in a foreign country having a casual conversation in another language. There were no struggles with the verbs or with the vocabulary. I was speaking Spanish. I actually stopped in the street, wowed by the thought. Now I want to get as much more practice as I can. I know I still have a long way to go before I will consider myself fluent, but now the goal doesn’t seem so far fetched and I want to take advantage of every opportunity while I’m here.

Caro’s friends visited for once and we have a great time talking around a lemon meringue pie. They had just finished talking to Caro and everyone was in high spirits. I’m looking forward to spending lazy summer days with them (en español). The

one bad thing about all my traveling is that I’ve missed the opportunity to make close friends with my Chilean classmates.

After a Farkle match, I taught the boys 31 and lost three games in a row. I created and mailed my best attempt at slightly artistic Christmas cards to my grandparents and my family. Then I pampered myself with another exceptional bath. The steaming water did wonders for my body even though I failed to break a sweat in baile entretenido. Maybe Richard Simmons can teach a thing or two to the Chileans after all.

Wednesday, December 10th
I helped Teresa with lunch and with the laundry whether she wanted it or not, and I think she’s getting used to the idea rather quickly. I am not going to be a lazy couch potato all summer. Fran came over for lunch, and she and Teco had a good laugh while “White Christmas” played on the radio. I think I was glowing. I love Christmas carols!

My first job as an international interpreter was a success. Carlos, the father of one of Maxi’s friends, picked me up at 3pm to
tour his fruit factory and translate a few questions for a prospective American client. He's super nice. After work, he even showed me his beautiful new house, artwork, puppies, and family like a rightfully proud papa. He also informed me that he wants to pay me for my efforts. We discussed how much I deserved and I discovered that the average worker in his factory receives $10 a day, but Carlos knows the US and our minimum wage standards. I think I'll be receiving about five dollars an hour. Not too shabby, especially with the experience factor.

I called to wish Pelao a happy birthday and ended up at his home for an informal celebration. The real party is on Friday, but since Matias has his birthday then too, I gave Pelao his Starburst today and earned a big hug for my generosity. These little fruit candies really are appreciated in Chile.

The tension of last week has disappeared and I'm much more at home with my host family.

Thursday, December 11th
I'm developing summer habits: wake up, talk myself into being lazy until I can't stand it, do my sit-ups, eat breakfast, check and reply to my mail for a good hour, and then help the nana. Today I invited Maca Bordachar over for lunch and we made cabbage rolls together. I had to dash across the street and borrow some mustard from Scarlett’s house and the nana just laughed at me. The meal was a success, but Matias refused to even try a bite and I was a bit riled. The cabbage rolls did lack a little salt, but that's typical Shelly. Also, the potatoes were fried instead of boiled because Teresa took advantage of my swim in the pool to ignore the directions I gave her, three times!

Maca and I played 31 and Farkle before she left and I devoured two delicious slices of tres leches cake that Tia Maca had brought over. It was a smart move because when Scarlet found out where her cake went, she fetched and finished the rest of the plate. I gave in to her wishes and tried to enjoy spending time with her in English even though I would have preferred español.

Cabbage Rolls
Rollos de rebolla

1 head cabbage
1 stale roll
1 small onion (peeled and diced)
1 egg
1lb hamburger
salt & pepper
1 t mustard
4T vegetable oil
1t beef bullion
1c water
4t flour
2T water

- Bring a large pot of water to boil. Place cabbage in water until outer leaves become limp and flexible. Remove outer leaves. Repeat until all leaves are loose.
- Soak roll in cold water. Drain liquid.
- Combine the roll, onion, egg, hamburger, salt, pepper, and mustard. Divide into five sections.
- Lay two cabbage leaves in a fan shape. Place meat mixture in the center. Roll the leaves into a ball around the meat. Tie with string or secure with toothpicks. Repeat.
- Heat the oil in a large pan. Brown rolls on both sides. Add 1c water and beef bouillon.
- Simmer rolls, turning occasionally, for 45-50min
- Remove rolls from pan. Combine flour with 2 T water and add to pan. Simmer 5 min.
- Pour sauce over rolls. Serve with potatoes.
Friday, December 12th

With a two second warning, I left the house with Fran’s mom and Agusta to go horseback riding. At first I wasn’t allowed do anything but sit in the saddle. The other girls even led my horse when we were walking to the arena and told me to be patient when asked to participate with the others. Finally, I joined the class and their jaws dropped as I posted in perfect time to the horses gait and with good posture to boot. I did need a stick to control the horse and next time I’ll wear better pants, but the girls were impressed. I’m glad that all those lessons Mom made me take have finally paid off.

Emily, Lindsey, and Nicole came over for baile entretenido, but as usual we were the last to be informed about the change in plans and waited alone with Tia Andrea’s nana. None of the aunts showed up and neither did the aerobics instructor. We came back to the house and Teco invited everyone to stay for lunch, but Teresa started yelling at me for not giving her advance notice. My hackles rose at this unjust accusation and I told her to yell at Teco, not me. He’s the one who invited extras. Eventually, she backed down, but I still needed a moment to collect myself.

Gundi and I decorated our little Christmas tree together. In Chile, there are very little decorations. Most houses have an artificial tree and a nativity set in the greeting room, but unfortunately, they don’t use that room often. As you pass through, you may notice the pretty ornaments, but no one really stops to soak in the beauty.

Then I went over to Pelao’s birthday party. I was a little early, but he didn’t mind. He even lent me the first two books of the Chronicles of Narnia written in Spanish. Unfortunately, I only had an hour and a half before Carola picked Nicole and me up for dinner. I had been given the option of which party to attend, but I really want to make myself a loved part of this family and decided that Matias’s birthday was more important than fun with friends. We ended up back at Scarlett’s to celebrate with manjar mil hojas and pan de Pascua. I love fruit cake! Afterwards, the gringas stuck around to get Australian tattoos, watch “Monster’s Inc.,” and be silly. On a whim, Nicole and I crawled back to my house instead of walking just because we could. We had to fight back our giggles as the neighborhood watchmen followed our progress with his beaming flashlight.

Pan de Pascua
Chilean Fruitcake

5c flour
5 eggs
3T butter
2 ½ c sugar
1t anis seed
½ t salt
milk (enough to form a soft dough)
1c nuts
1c raisins
2 t baking powder

-Combine the flour, eggs, butter, sugar, anis, salt and milk.
  Beat for 10min.
-Add the baking powder, raisins, and nuts.
-Bake (time and temperature unknown)
  Your guess is as good as mine.

Saturday, December 13th

I invited Jessie to watch the polo game with me and Carola's first response was, “What happened to Emily?” Favorites in Curicó? You bet. Lindsay joined us later and we walked together to Carsten’s goodbye party and discovered that they had blocked off the streets in the center to set up street fairs and Christmas displays. The lights glowed as the sun set and street vendors sent sweet aromas wafting through the air. I was as excited as a child, eyes wide, taking it all in.

Tía Pia is amazing in her generosity. Now that Noelle has gone home to Brazil and Carsten is on the verge of leaving, she has offered her home to Emily who is still having problems with her host dad. If Rotary agrees, I can still visit friends every time I pass through the center.
Emily starting her new diet on Monday and Nicole has dropped 8-10 pounds in the last month. She was afraid I'd hit her when she told me, but all I can do is be concerned.

Sunday, December 14th
I went swimming in the pool despite the chilly wind and cloudy sky, but I paid the price when I got home. Carola swears I'm going to get sick, and when my allergies went haywire in the country, she ported the “I told you so” look very well. Tea time initiated an interesting stereotype. I learned that ALL Americans eat TV dinners and fast food. We don't use real plates and silverware, and all our meals are heaped with sugar or barbecue sauce. However, even though the food is so awful, Caro still gained 5 kg (11 lbs) and Carola is sending her pills to reduce her appetite and block fat, a common practice in Chile. It’s too bad she doesn’t have a nana around to give her a girly half portion at every meal. Then she’d really feel at home.

Mom called and the phone connection cut out without warning. I now know how important the words “I love you” really are. I felt lost and adrift without the simple and yet so powerful goodbye declaration. Luckily, she called back and we ended at the right spot.

Monday, December 15th
Four Month Anniversary!
I got some real work done today. Hurray! Teresa was swamped with party preparations and welcomed an extra pair of hands with little protest. I chopped cilantro, gathered up the dirty breakfast dishes, and set the table. Carola even called and asked me to bake bread for the party. To be more specific, she asked for pan amasado. I went to the store, bought the mix, kneaded the dough, formed it into individual rolls, and put it in the oven. One rack looks really good, but the others I had to put on the wire grid because they only have one cookie sheet. Next time, I’ll just be patient and wait because the dough molded through the wires and now looks pretty funny. Note: you shouldn’t always follow the directions on the back of the box because your host mom may prefer smaller rolls in larger quantities. Luckily, Carola wasn’t really upset. She just said that I should ask someone next time, but since I had asked Theresa if the bread was how it was supposed to be and she said "yes," I didn’t kick myself too hard. The rolls took forever to bake, but came out very tasty, slightly salty and great with butter.

Pan amasado
Kneaded bread

4c flour
½ c butter or Crisco
salt
15 grams yeast
½ c warm water

-Dissolve yeast in warm water. Set aside.
-In a large bowl, combine flour, salt to taste, and softened butter
-Mix in yeast/water to make a soft dough.
(Add more water if necessary.)
-Let bread rise for three hours.
-Knead dough until it becomes soft and malleable.
-Shape into individual loaves.
-Bake.

With all the cooking projects, Carola hired an extra nana to do the ironing which took most of the afternoon. When she had finished, the woman joined us in to help prepare pajaritos (which I believe were turtledoves), pavo (turkey), quesillo (soft cheese), pebre (tomatoes mixed with diced onion and cilantro), arroz con choclo y palta formado con mayonesa (a mayonaised rice mold with corn and avocado), papas a la crema (scalloped potatoes), ensalada with a ranch-like dressing, meringue cake, and tres leches. I learned how to say get out of the way in Chile: echáte al pollo. Which literally means “throw yourself to the chicken.” It was a nice crowded birthday party with many chatty relatives and
my rolls were a big success. Buvi brought me two kinds of chocolate and told me about her most recent fishing trip in the rain. I also learned that when you want to ask “who is that man?” You must use the question, “Quién es este señor?” because “Quién es este hombre?” is very rude. It should only be used for drunkards and beggars. I hope the señor wasn’t offended.

Tuesday, December 16th
Maxi and I started making sugar cookies together until he decided he didn't like frosting and tired of the game. Milk, powdered sugar, and food coloring created homemade icing and I decorated to my lonely heart’s content. Luckily, Alé dropped in for a visit and we finished strong together. With all humbleness aside, they look good! Spots, stripes, and smiley faces in all shapes and sizes.

Later, Jessie and I walked to the center for a theatrical production. Actually there were five separate productions put on by the local schools. Jessie and I sat on the floor in the front row. The talent was impressive, although the deep philosophical meanings were hard to follow. Chileans are really into psychology and dark drama. Their movies and sitcoms often resolve around realistic or historic themes, but the focus is on the darkness of human nature. The combination of two disquieting dances and two intense plays was lightened by a clown act accompanied by familiar music, including the themes for Looney Tunes, James Bond, and Bonanza.

The magic of Christmas comes alive in the plaza at night. A canopy of lights hangs over the central fountain and the biggest Charlie Brown Christmas tree I have ever seen. The artificial lights sparkle against the starry sky where Orion and the Southern Cross are unmistakable in the background. Several blocked off streets serve as a central gathering place. Mimes, spray-paint artists, beggars, popcorn and peanut venders, policemen, and pedestrians carrying giant waffled ice cream cones merge together amongst the brightly lit streetlights and upbeat music.

Wednesday, December 17th
I started re-reading The King’s Chancelings to refresh the details in my mind and realized how much revamping it could use. Three years makes a big difference in my style as a writer and I continued reading with a pencil in hand, making corrections and/or suggestions for further study.

Teresa has fallen ill and we are now on our third nana. Her name is Maria, not to be confused with Maria Elena who still helps out a few days a week. She made a great bean soup for lunch with corn and pumpkin mixed in.

This evening, Carola, Jessie, and I attended a Christmas concert in town. The children's chorus and juvenile orchestra of Talca put on quite a show. At the end, they played traditional American carols. My favorite was their rendition of “Silent Night” by candlelight. I was beaming as brightly as my candle. The only thing that could've made it better was ice cream, but I guess that's an Alpeter family tradition. The choir reminded me of the Canto Civic Opera, including the gorgeous yet boring Latin arias.

Thursday, December 18th
I can't believe that after ten hours of sleep two days in a row without exercising, I can still be so exhausted. Maybe it’s the lack of activity that's wearing me out. I really dislike not having a to-do list and a sense of purpose. I have nothing to plan, work on, cook, or cleanup. The new nana is very efficient, and I barely have time to gather the dirty discarded breakfast dishes and make a bed before everything is spotless. I can only read and write so much and I'm tired of being lazy, but enough complaining. I had lunch with Nicole before meeting with the other exchange students in the center.

Maxi’s end of school play was adorable. The first through fifth graders presented the history of France with modern music, costumes, and dance. The picapedras (Flintstones) were adorable, followed by campesinos producing a simple country harvest. These domestic scenes were followed by a display of impressive sword fights between the Gauls and the Romans and ended with the French Revolution.
All the exchange students, Rotarians, and wives were invited to the Christmas meeting. We officially welcomed Jana (Germany) to Curicó and welcomed Pepe (Chile) back from his year abroad in Australia. The Rotary also took this moment to bid Scarlett farewell. Once again, Nicole ended up in my bedroom wearing my pink piggy pajamas.

Friday, December 19.
I chatted with Mom while Nicole slept in. She was blocking my closets and I paraded in PJs until 10:45. It was kind of fun. We walked to the center to find glass jars so that Nicole can make decorative hot chocolate gift containers for Christmas. We also bought wrapping paper and stickers. It was a hard choice between snowflakes and Winnie the Pooh, but Pooh Bear won out in the end. Nicole’s summer is filled with travel plans and in the fall (March), she's entering the university in Santiago instead of going back to her high school. Her plans were all hush-hush until yesterday.

Mom sent me a Christmas card. I thought I was perfectly fine missing the holidays at home, but when I read their names, the tears started to fall, soft, flowing, and numerous. It was a peaceful cry. The kind that shows, “I am loved!”

I spent all afternoon helping create decorations for Sunday's concert in the plaza. Jessie and I dug into the hot glue, newspapers, chicken wire, and staple guns with a fervor for four hours, but we stopped short of weaving the pine boughs into the frames. My allergies wouldn’t allow that so we serenaded the other women with American Christmas carols instead.

Saturday, December 20th
Soup in Chile is always creamed. I asked Maria if I could have leftover bean soup for lunch, the one with the corn and pumpkin. Naturally, there was no problem except that I requested soup. She put the whole mix in a blender, creating a very unappealing goo. I guess if you want the chunky version, you have to know the concoction’s specific name.

Buvi’s promises of a trip to Santiago finally came through. At five o'clock we took a train to the city, dropped our bags at her mom's apartment, and hit the mall. She had last-minute shopping to do and was worried stiff that I’d die of boredom, but I loved it. Window shopping interests me on all occasions and the week before Christmas is the best. The decorations were out in abundance and I didn't try to stop myself from singing along with the Christmas songs. We even convinced the security guard to let the gringa take a picture in Santa’s big red chair.

At 10:30, Buvi bought me ice cream. Note: two flavors at Bravisimo is a LOT of ice cream. I tried crema de mil hojas and a pistachio chocolate mixture. They served the ice cream in bowls with the cone sprouting out the top. Buvi noticed that I like the taste of the cone with the ice cream and ordered me two extras so that I didn't have to finish my treat with a spoon. At 12:30 we returned to the apartment for dinner. After such a delicious and very large dessert, I was by no means hungry, but Buvi insisted. She still wants to fatten me up!

Sunday, December 21st
This morning we toured Santiago, but traveled the neighborhoods instead of the city itself. The architecture was impressive. Most of the well-off houses had a Mediterranean air, but there was one that I loved with the flare of Arabia. It had an open air winding staircase that led to a rooftop patio with a great view of the valley. We took a slight detour because a city wide marathon blocked off the highway to let over 5000 runners jog their hearts out. I like jogging too, but I think hours and hours is a bit much for my tastes. When we finally reached the mall, The Home Center was filled with Christmas music and Buvi bought me
a cheerful pink and orange striped candle. We also found molasses and ginger at Jumbo to make cookies together.

We hurried home for the Christmas concert in the plaza, munching pan amasado hot out of the oven, but the crowd had begun to scatter as we arrived. We missed every carol, but the boys were really excited to see me and to ask about our shopping results. My lips are sealed, but the pen admits that Buvi has yet to find their gifts.

When I returned home, “The Return of the Jedi” was playing in español, and I had to stay up and watch it just for Dad.

Monday, December 22nd

The pool at the Estadio Español is closed on Mondays and I was officially kicked out by the gateman. I guess they do have to clean it sometime.

Mom signed on to AOL while I was checking e-mail and couldn't wait another day, hour, or minute to talk to me. Dad was working and Katie was still in bed, but she logged off and dialed my phone number. It was fun. I felt missed and loved. Before we hung up, Katie’s sleepy voice came on the phone and she asked me again why I couldn't come home in January. She wants her Nutrition Nazi back and a confidant for some boy troubles, but that's top secret. She also reminded me that she still wants a sequel to The King’s Chancelings. Won’t that be a surprise when she actually gets one!

Nicole gave me my Christmas gift today. Who else would wrap up a roll of travel toilet paper and consider it a present? She's fabulous! I smiled and laughed, but it’s definitely an exchange student thing. None of my friends from home would understand what a luxury Kleenex and toilet paper can be. Having toilet paper provided in public restrooms is one of those amenities that we take for granted in the US. This travel roll will definitely come in handy on any future trips. Unfortunately, I hadn’t realized that she's leaving tomorrow to begin her summer-long traveling adventures so I had to sneak back to my room and wrap the specialty hot chocolate that I had gotten her. She couldn’t have Christmas without cocoa.

In the evening, I went shoe and underwear shopping with Carola, Teco and Matias. That boy knows exactly what he’s getting for Christmas because he’s so picky that he has to pick everything out himself. No surprises. How boring! The gifts aren’t very exciting either. It’s all tennis clothing because he just got a bag and new racket for his birthday. They scanned through all the tennis shoes, underwear, and sports socks in Falabela and then searched some smaller stores. Teco was a bit bored so we got ice cream cones and walked through the center.

Then Scarlett came over to watch “White Christmas” and stayed around chatting until 3:30. I love that movie. I didn't even fast-forward through the “choreography” section this year. It was especially fun to watch with a girl from Australia. She’s never seen a white Christmas and the whole movie is based on the principle, “What is Christmas with no snow?” Now she sees what I was raised on.

Tuesday, December 23rd

It was a loner morning. The boys went to Talca for tennis, Carola had a day out with her artsy friends, and Teco worked like usual. I slept in late, made scrambled eggs and yogurt, and went to the pool. It took some effort to convince the nana that I was fine with leftovers and that she didn't have to prepare something special for me, but in the end, I had my way. In the meantime, I managed to finish my Christmas wrapping and all my cards before helping Scarlett make a pumpkin pie. We had no recipe, no experience, sketchy measurements, yet she still wondered why I was skeptical that our creation would turn out alright. When I got back, the boys were having an asado in the back yard and I was craving hot dogs. Unfortunately, they claimed no girls allowed. I was bummed and a little ruffled that they were that immature, especially when I was hungry, but I just went to the kitchen to find something else. Then to make matters worse, Matias came in and insisted that I clean up after them. I don't think so! I am not their nana.

Mom sent me an email that left me salivating for traditional Christmas goodies: “Katie and I spent most of the day making ginger cookies, cut-outs, chocolate covered pretzels, peanuts and
just a little licorice for me. We also made wassail which taste good and smells even better.” Quite honestly, it doesn’t feel like Christmas in Chile. For an Ohio girl, sunshine, swimsuits, and 90º heat does not compute into the holiday equation. I need to build a man out of white fluffy snow, sing carols around the piano or in a congregation by candlelight, enjoy the sight of beautiful decorations proudly displayed in each house, share memories with family and friends, bake and taste the sugar cookies, buckeyes, fruit cake, and chocolate covered pretzels, attend the mad rush of parties, struggle with choosing the perfect gift for all our gift exchanges, and continue spreading (and believing) the Santa stories and traditions. The presents aren’t that important, but I miss the holiday habits that I’ve enjoyed all my life. Therefore, I feel that this year I’ve just skipped Christmas and will have to wait another twelve months for the season to come around again. At which time, I will be at home. One thing a year away has taught me is that dreaming about it can never substitute really being home for Christmas.

Wednesday, December 24th

Christmas Eve was busy busy busy. I woke up and made Christmas tree Christmas cards, filling the inside with warm thank you notes for all my Chilean aunts, uncles, grandparents, and immediate family. Then I invited the boys to watch “Miracle on 34th street” with me and then helped Maria make all the beds. I’m really starting to like this new nana. She’s very friendly, let’s me help, and even asks for favors as we chat together. Maxi came and found me at 10am, “Shelly! The movie’s starting,” and we snuggled down on the couch. Later, I made sugar and ginger cookies at Buvi’s house with the worst oven I’ve ever seen in my life. No heat above and iron trays left white tops and blackened bottoms. I was a bit skeptical, but the Chileans loved them. Of the ten dozen cookies we started out with, only a dozen remain after twenty-four hours.

I helped Scarlet write thank you notes (I wonder where she got that idea) before heading to the campo. The kids put on a silent nativity skit and we all joined in to sing “Noche de Paz” (Silent Night)

Before dinner, all the kids had to go search for Santa. We danced in a ring and chanted a traditional rhyme while the older boys led the youngsters along. When we returned to the house, the big Christmas tree was surrounded by presents and everyone pounced. No one paused to show off his or her presents, or watch as someone else found a new treasure. Any wrapped package with your name on it was fair game and in five minutes we were done.

Carola loved the pinecone wreath that Mom made for her and they used it as the centerpiece for the dinner table. Dad’s hand made nativity scene and Grandma’s quilted pillow cases received many oohs and ahhs as well. The Chileans were amazed at my family’s talent, and Teco decided that they’d better get some more gifts for my family before they head to the states to visit Caro. The boys loved their presents too!

I received lots of hugs for my warm words and fabulous gifts from Carola and Teco. My host family was very generous to their adopted daughter and they put a lot of thought into my presents. I received a Chilean cookbook, a CD with Spanish villancicos (Christmas carols), a Feliz Navidad tank top to remember my summery Christmas, and everything I need to hit the beach. Dinner
lasted until midnight with an entree of raw hamburger “cooked” in lemon juice on crackers (I was a bit scared, but it tasted good), shrimp salad with homemade mayonnaise, turkey, creamy potatoes, a carrot cabbage peanut and raisin salad, and lots of dessert. We had pumpkin pie, strawberry meringue torte, and manjar.

At midnight we left to visit Buvi, but stayed just long enough to open gifts. Buvi gave me a sailboat beach towel and sun block, Andrea gave me a little agenda notebook, Pilar gave me a beautifully fashioned belt, and Isabel gave me some citrus lip gloss. I was exhausted and took the boys home early while the adults stayed to talk. I thought about opening my presents from home, but decided to wait until I was a little more bright eyed and bushy tailed.

Thursday, December 25th
Merry Christmas!

I was up and hungry at 6am. I guess seafood is very filling, but doesn’t last long. I snuck to the kitchen for a peanut butter and raisin sandwich, crept back to my room, started Amy Grant’s Christmas CD, piled my family’s gifts on the bed, and snuggled back under the covers. What treasures I received! My family is wonderful! I received cheerful yellow socks for happy feet, beautiful jewelry, a Thomas Kincaid puzzle (my favorite), oldies music, and two DVDs that can be watched in Spanish or English. I’ll have to visit my aunt across the street to borrow her DVD player very soon. My sweet tooth was satisfied with a giant fruit cake and yummy Reese’s Sticks. What can I say? Four months hasn’t lessened the peanut butter obsession. I went back to bed until the family woke around 11am. Maxi was already absorbed in the Frogger computer game I had given him, and Agustin was waiting almost patiently for me to explain the rules to Risk. It was a day to relax.

We set up a family lunch on the patio and welcomed aunts, uncles, and cousins to join us for a swim or sunbath. Here is where I had my first culture clash. My very wonderful mother had told me to sunbathe on Christmas just because I could and that’s how she wanted to think of me while they were enjoying Christmas in the snow. Unfortunately, my host mother bought me a bright neon bikini for Christmas. One song comes to mind, “She wore an itsy bitsy teeny weeny…….” Well, that’s the idea anyway. It seems funny now, but it took me forty minutes and not a few tears to get up the courage to leave my room. It was quite an internal debate. I wanted to please my host family, but modest little Shelly is not exactly accustomed to string bikinis. Sigh. I guess I’ll learn. My sixteen year old brother made a special point to say, “Te ve muy linda en este bikini.” Very nice, huh? Well, I just have to keep Dad’s advice in mind, “let them look, but not touch.” The crazy things I do in Chile.

It took four attempts to connect with my family, but we did get to talk for Christmas. Katie made out with one less daughter in the house, and Dad went overboard like always with movies and computer games. They even had snow!

Friday, December 26th
Carola and Teco left this morning to visit Caro in the states. The boys are staying with Buvi and I’m moving in with Jessie for a few days, but I’ll spend New Years with my Chilean grandparents at the lake. I used the cloudy morning to write all my thank you notes, create a Chilean update, and pack my bag. At lunch, I realized I was still signed on to AOL and Zac, Mike, and Dad were all ready to chat. I picked at the leftover turkey and mashed potatoes between phrases. After an hour of chatting and working up his courage, Mike called me. The calling card was Laura’s Christmas gift to him. He didn’t recognize me at first because I
answered the phone in Spanish. He sounded older and was nervous to start out, but he relaxed soon enough and we talked for an hour.

I took my stuff over to Jessie and had once, sharing my fruitcake before heading to the center to return my Christmas towel that is already unraveling. At first, I was afraid the fruitcake would outlast its welcome, but there's only a fourth left. I've been snacking well and I believe Teco and Carola breakfasted well too. I let Jessie's family try the Ohio version, but I think I'll hide the rest tomorrow. Relishing my present isn't too greedy, right? Jessie's family also have a great pan de Pascua that just has nuts. Delicious, moist, and unburnt!

Ernesto invited us to his house for dinner. The pasta with spinach sauce was fabulous, but the best part was the crusty Italian bread. I ended up leaving noodles on my plate so that I could soak up the yummy sauce with the warm bread instead.

Saturday, December 27th

I woke up early and had breakfast so that I can go to the pool and then slept for three more hours. Jessie finally opened her presents today with her Ohio family watching on the other end of her web cam. I helped her start the Santa coloring book, but of all colors, I lacked a red crayon.

I did steal my fruitcake back upstairs where Jessie and I watched “White Christmas.” She is a great companion for old musicals. She loves the old dances, costumes, and songs as much as I do, and she laughs out loud all the jokes. When the first movie ended, we caught the last half of “Legally Blond.” Afterwards, we had to practice the bend and snap. What a crazy exchange student moment. Neither of us are even blond.

Jessie's mom took me to Lider just because I was interested. She had me pick out my favorite cereal, even though I'd just be here two or three days. Later, I found out that she expects me to eat it for tea as well as breakfast.

Sunday, December 28th

I went with Jessie’s family to mass this morning. She slept through and got in trouble for missing the weekly ritual, but according to her they’ve only gone three or four times since she’s been here. The dad bought me ice cream after church, pistachio and tres leches and then decided we’d go out to eat. Without a nana, that seems to be a normal for Sunday. We had a really juicy soft roast in a restaurant that didn’t even have a menu. Everyone ate what was served and was happy with it, or at least they didn’t complain too much. I also had the first French fries that I’ve eaten in what seems like forever. They were homemade, thick cut, and well salted (after I was done with them). Yummy.

As for my bikini, I did cut the tag off yesterday and it felt alright for the first day, but today I was starting to ask myself why I don’t even like sunbathing and I feel toasted and dry. There is a reason that I never used the tanning beds like the other girls at home before the dances. At least lying out on the grass is more relaxing and enjoyable. I burnt a bit where the sun now shines and didn’t before, but not to worry. It doesn’t hurt.

Monday, December 29th

Maria came to the house to water the streets, although I think she was trying to water the grass. While she was there, I snuck inside to get my PJ's which I had forgotten to pack and my new DVDs. Jessie and I have big movie plans. I also walked to the center to mail thank you cards. Everyone who sent a Christmas card to Chile definitely deserved my gratitude this year.

I helped Jessie's nana make humitos, corn cakes boiled in the husk, but limited myself to one for lunch. They can be served with sugar or tomatoes and are a summer staple. I heard a rumor that once a week is normal, but I hope not. I barely choked down the one I had for lunch and Jessie didn't do much better.

We visited Scarlett in the afternoon. She only has three days left in Curicó and we satisfied our cravings for ice cream, bananas, and manjar in the kitchen before Lindsay, Jacquelyn, and Kristen came over to watch “The Christmas List.” It was a very cheesy,
predictable, and unrealistic movie, but sweet. Kristen's mom had taped it off of ABC's 25 days of Christmas and mailed it down. However, the commercials caused my first big holiday homesickness. They were just so typical with time-saving, pop in the oven cookies and decorations for underwear ads and jewelry stores. We munched on pan y palta and I helped Scarlet hem her pants.

Jessie and I walked home by starlight, grabbed a bite to eat (dark meat chicken is better cold) and watched the end of "Erin Brockovich." I relished another piece of fruitcake, amazed that there're just three pieces left. Maybe I shouldn't have shared after all, but no, it was a nice gesture and if I'm left craving more, it will be more special next year. I definitely won't worry about having too much.

I edited a lot more of The Kings Chancelings and I started a list of things I want to do when I get home. I'm a bit embarrassed to say that the food list is long and nowhere near complete. It was interesting seeing what I missed from home. Examples: writing on the grocery list, carrying the phone out to Dad's garage in my bare feet, leaning on Mom to watch a movie, washing the dishes, shopping at Wal-Mart, Sundays with Grandma, soaking in our bathtub, walking down the road to the stop sign, working in the veggie garden... That's just the beginning.

Tuesday, December 30th

We had salpicon, a cool "leftovers" salad, with cold cooked potatoes, chicken, and lettuce for lunch. I wish I could have had more salad instead of the bean soup I forced myself to eat, but I can't win them all. Jessie and I played Nertz until our brains hurt and then we discovered that American DVDs don't play in the southern hemisphere. Sigh. I had to pout since I couldn't watch my Christmas present. We had both been looking forward to it.

Sergio Castro called and invited me to spend a week in his house in Santiago. I had written him about Jen and he agreed that we shouldn't let her feel neglected by family. Since Carola and Teco are out of the country, they had arranged for her to stay with the chairman until our Rotary trip up north, but that didn't seem very friendly to me. I'd still rather that Buvi pick her up and bring her home. She could unpack, relax, explore her new home, meet friends, and re-pack for the trip north, but we'll see. The least I can do is go to Santiago myself to welcome her to Chile.

Nertz
Group Solitaire on Speed

-Each player needs his own deck of cards with a unique pattern on the back.
-To begin, each player deals himself a pile of thirteen cards (twelve face down and one face up) called the Nertz pile. Each player also sets four individual cards face up in front of himself.
-Players may draw from their deck in sets of three, but only the top card may be played.
-The four individual columns function like solitaire in descending numerical order, alternating between red and black. Piles can be combined when feasible and empty spaces filled with whatever card the player chooses.
-In the center, new piles can be started with an Ace. The piles then ascend numerically within the same suit. When a king is played ending the sequence, the pile must be removed from the center by the person who laid the king and set aside.
-The object of the game is to have the most cards in the center and to be the first person to get rid or your Nertz pile.
-When a player plays his last Nertz card, he should yell Nertz and play stops. Points are then tallied. Any card played in the center is a positive point and any card left in the Nertz pile is a negative point.

Wednesday, December 31st

I spent the holiday in Lake Vichukuen with my grandparents, Uncle Pablo, Aunt Isabel, and my brothers. It was to be week of relaxation with no real plans. The terrain is very rustic with dry,
rolling, pine covered hills. However, there is a transformation as the lake comes into view. As you descend the slightly scary and very steep driveways, the sunshine reflects off the water, very large and expensive houses, well manicured lawns filled with bright flowers, and a white layer of clouds that hangs just above the mountains. Less than ten minutes away, you can drive to the Pacific Ocean, but clouds cover the sky and the blustery wind causes lots of goosebumps. During the two hour car ride, I taught the boys to sing Kookaburra and then they both slept a bit, Maxi on my lap and Gundi against my shoulder. It was a good sisterly feeling.

The lake house is gorgeous. The three Soler brothers share the front lawn with umbrellas, beach chairs, and three boat ramps. The grass is well cared for and flowers abound in the otherwise arid landscape. It reminded me of a mix between Canada’s rustic wilderness and upper-class Lake Mohawk luxury. The water is undrinkable, there's no TV or radio, and the nana doesn't show up till 10am, but I think we'll survive. I joined the family for a spin in the family speedboat, explored the house, reveled in the existence of three enormous bathtubs, and drank hot chocolate because the chill was already setting in. With the breeze off the water, the weather forecast changed from hot to “I need my jeans, sweatshirt, and new happy socks.” I hope I have enough layers!

We waited for the New Year playing Risk and Pit. The time flew, especially since we didn’t eat dinner until after 10pm, and we did the ten second countdown listening to the car radio. Fireworks erupted across the water so we sipped our champagne on the deck and watched the lights. I wish I could see the ball drop in Times Square. It’s strange to think that my family still has an hour to wait before they can celebrate.

I have to take a moment to describe the vacation system in Chile. Basically, the exodus reaches its peak in January and February, and Curicó is left with an empty feeling. Most young people go from city to city for weeks at a time, staying with friends and relatives. The families also rent houses near the water or share a friend’s humble luxury home for a few weeks. They live to sunbathe. A normal day at the beach or the lake includes breakfast around 11am, recreation until a 2:30 lunch, recreation until tea time at 7pm, and last minute recreation before a 10pm dinner. Recreation consists of sunbathing, reading a bit, sunbathing again, a little ping pong or card playing, more sunbathing, a chance of swimming/water sports, and a final bout of sunbathing. Is it any wonder that the word for suntan and sunburn are the same in Chile?

Thursday, January 1st

I organized the outline for The Kings Chancelings: A Continuation, listening to the waves lap against the shoreline. The water is fabulous. I wore jeans and long sleeves all day, except for when I was laying out in my new bikini, so I was amazed at how warm the water turned out to be when I jumped in for a swim.

Twilight is gorgeous here. Softened light increases the lake’s beauty. The windows of the neighboring cottages sparkle and glow while the green pines stretch up the hillside toward the cloud covered sky.

Buvi and I might need to have a showdown tomorrow. She's the sweetest person, but if I have to listen to “how little” I eat one more time, I will most likely snap. She mentioned it no less than seven times today. I honestly don't know if she just doesn't pay attention to what I eat or if she’s still stuck in the past because I'm
eating well, double her intake and the same or more than Isabel. Even Maxi noticed how much she’s picking on me and the cheeky kid used the info to distract her from chastising him for all the food left on his plate. I honestly thought that we had fixed this problem. I even talked to her about it, but tomorrow may call for a serious conversation.

Friday, January 2\textsuperscript{nd}

I woke up early and decided to go walking. In Chile, all the beachfront is considered public property, so I passed from house to house, admiring the gorgeous layouts. Each one had several balconies, large windows, powerboats, shade huts, lounging chairs, sailboats, kayaks, and several gardeners. I had to maneuver several obstacle courses as the impressive sprinkler systems kicked in, but I only got soaked once. Misty clouds blocked the burning sun, and it felt just like the shoreline where we vacation in Canada, right down to the smell. I guess fish and seaweed are the same all over the world. I missed Mom as I walked alone. She would have loved the bright flowers.

The boys couldn’t wait to learn to ski today. While we were out in the boat yesterday, I took the opportunity to show off my skills and wowed them with my “no hands” trick. They were most impressed with their gringa sister and they’re eager to mimic my actions, but I tried to explain to them that it would take time and practice before they could follow my lead. After all, today was their first time and I’ve been skiing since I was five. In the end, Gundi managed to sail across the water after only four tries, but Maxi still needs some work. He can’t seem to keep the tips of his skis out of the water to start off. I took lots of pictures to share with Carola when we get back.

I finished my outline for the new novel, but failed to start writing. I ended up soaking in the tub (my skiing muscles are definitely out of practice) and playing Farkle with Buvi and the boys. Gundi rolled six fives all at once, winning the game instantly. I was flabbergasted and he was beaming all afternoon. I have never seen that happen before.

I can cross grilled cheeseburgers off my “food cravings” list for a while. Pablo fixed an American \textit{asado} for lunch and I had two toast-y warm burgers with cheese, lettuce, and mayonnaise. MMmmm…. Fabulous!

We had visitors for dinner. Tío Roberto from Rivarolo brought his family to spend the evening with us. My best big smile appeared with fresh memories of his Italian cooking. He also brought a \textit{pan de Pascua} as a hostess gift which gave him even more brownie points in my eyes. I wonder if you can be addicted to fruit cake.

Saturday, January 3\textsuperscript{rd}

\textit{Floja} once again. I had an early breakfast with \textit{pan de Pascua} and return to my bed for a two hour nap. The family started rousing itself at 11am and Buvi, Tata, Maxi and I traveled to Llico to do some shopping where the fish shops served as my school for the day. I can now recognize \textit{jaivas} (Chilean crabs), \textit{lenguado} (flounder), and \textit{machas} (pink mussels). I was amazed at how chilly the beach was, windy and overcast. The lake is less than twenty minutes away, but while the other side of the hill is sunny and warm, we shivered in the wind standing along the coastline.

The lakefront that lines our shore is perfect for swimming, although the waves are a bit rough for a proper stroke, I paddled about for a good forty-five minutes. My leisure activities revolved around sunning, reading \textit{Prince Caspian}, and starting my new novel. I miss my computer! Cut-and-paste comes in very handy when you’re trying to write many pages.

We were invited to dinner at 7:30 and arrived in good time (a little over an hour tardy). The main appetizer, besides pretzels, which I haven’t eaten in five months, was \textit{churitos} (a small breed of mussels). They are my favorite seafood thus far even if most
gringas don't like the strong taste. Secret recipe: boil the mussel juice with garlic that has been browned in olive oil until half of the liquid evaporates. Then add the mussels and some parsley for a minute and a half. The churitos are best when served on club crackers, at least that’s my personal opinion.

Sunday, January 4th

I had my first taste of machas and conejo for lunch. I’ll skip the big mussels in the future. They weren’t bad, but they weren’t really that appealing either. However, the rabbit was fabulous. They cooked the meat in the typical carrot and onion sauce, and I was informed that conejo is a very healthy meat, no cholesterol or bad fat.

Sunshine, swimming, reading, and waterskiing filled up my last afternoon at the lake. I also spent time with the boys. We played soccer in bare feet and they were very interested when I tore off half of my big toenail. Boys! Maxi and Gundi also received English lessons. Maxi has to know all the colors and the numbers 1-10 before Carola gets back from visiting Caro in Ohio and Gundi was a well of curiosity. I had to call a halt after an hour and a half of quizzing and help Buvi pack up the car for our return trip.

Monday, January 5th

I had a very productive morning chatting with Mom online, creating captions for Christmas photos, and answering e-mails. Rafa invited both Nicole and I to come visit him in Colombia. What an opportunity! I'd like to go, but I'm nervous to go alone. Hopefully, Nicole has the ganas. I also started writing in earnest, breaking in my laptop to the work of a novel. It felt so good to be writing again. I'm excited to keep it up and see if I can have Katie’s surprise ready for next Christmas.

Pablo and Isabel now have the pleasure of watching over the boys and me until Carola and Teco return from the states. For the next ten days, they’ll be living with us in Curicó rather than their apartment in Santiago. For lunch, Pablo made real tomato sauce for our spaghetti, which the boys refused to try because it wasn’t plain crema, but I loved it. I think I’m going to like having them around.

While we were eating, the post man delivered seven cards for me: five Christmas wishes, my ACT/SAT scores, and Grandma Wise’s grocery list. This was my first encounter with her absentmindedness and I had to laugh a little. I hope she doesn’t expect me to do her shopping from Chile.

Starlet’s goodbye party was fun and informal, just a casual hang out. The boys threw her in the pool as a sendoff and we took a big group photo. This is where Kristin’s therapy session started and I learned all about her boy troubles. She can't decide if she likes or doesn't like her host brother from Uruguay. Technically, he has a girlfriend, but she’s already gotten to third base and she likes what she sees. I guess I’m acquiring a reputation as a good listener and Kristen suggested that I become a psychologist because people just tell me things.

Mom, Dad, and Katie called and we talked for an hour and forty-five minutes. They miss me and I miss them, almost enough to say that nine months is too much and that I should catch a plane home, but I will survive. I just wish someone were here now to ask embarrassing questions to. Lucky for Mom, she's still in Ohio.

Tuesday, January 6th

Scarlett left after lunch. I helped her and Kristin pack in the morning and came over to see her off. Afterwards, I walked a teary Kristin home and stayed to talk awhile. She and Scarlett were really close and she was really upset to lose a friend.

We had the second asado of the week on the patio and Pablo has already planned another for Friday. I love the food this week. It's all fresh, well spiced, and different from what we have every single other week. Today we had chuletas al jugo for lunch. The pork chops were served with a carrot and onion sauce, and they went well with fruit salad for dessert. The new Maria is big on tutifruti and we have one almost every meal.

I finished my new batch of thank you notes, updated my Miami application, and completed the prologue for Katie’s sequel. All in all, it was a very productive day.
Wednesday, January 7th

We had salpicon (leftovers salad) for lunch. The boys refused to eat it, but I had second helpings instead of borotos granados. I'm developing an aversion to Chilean bean soup due to the frequency with which we eat it. I'm going to miss it when Pablo and Isabel leave. I like the food variety. Maria asked me to make something rico for dessert so we threw together a carrot cake. She'll buy the cream cheese tomorrow morning and the postre will be all set. I borrowed a spring pan form from Maca, and she and Claudio talked me out of visiting Colombia to see Rafa. The last time they went to Columbia, they took professional body guards with them and arranged for government escorts, but they still had problems. The country is in a civil war with lots of guerilla fighters and drug lords. Kidnappings are common occurrences, especially if you are an American. I think I will stay safely in Chile.

Carrot Cake
Torta de zanahorias

½ c sugar - Cream first five ingredients
½ c brown sugar - Stir in carrots, nuts, raisins, and coconut
¼ c oil - Combine dry ingredients and stir into mix
4 eggs - Bake 40-45min at 350º
1½ t vanilla - * For double layers, use two round pans
5c shredded carrots - * For a sheet cake, use a 9” x 13” pan
1c nuts
½ c raisins
1c coconut
2c flour
2t baking soda - Allow to cool then top with icing
1½ t salt - Garnish with shredded carrots and/or nuts
4t cinnamon

Icing: 8oz cream cheese
2-3c powdered sugar

I completed another day's work on Katie sequel. I hope it becomes easier as I go because it takes a long time. Being a picky perfectionist doesn't help much either.

The pool wasn't tempting me so I put on my jogger's (Australian vocab for tennis shoes) and did a few laps on the shady side of the plaza before running through my Tae Kwon Do forms. It's been at least a month if not two, and I was surprised to remember as many moves as I did. By the time I was done, I had quite a few spectators.

Thursday, January 8th

Carola and Teco met Mom and Dad in Ohio yesterday. They toured Warther’s Carving Museum and had lunch together, but they didn't talk much. Mom says the Carola has pretty eyes and that they seem nice. Carola pulled Mom aside to tell her about my weight loss, and Mom double checked with me on AOL, but she doesn't seem too worried. I explained the whole thing and let loose a few tears. I wish I would have told her sooner just to have a confidant, but with everything that’s happening with Grandma and Grandpa Wise, I didn't want to add to her burden.

We tried the carrot cake for lunch and it was a big success. At first, no le tincó a Pablo (the sound of vegetable in a dessert didn’t appeal to him at all), but he devoured his first slice with gusto and had seconds with coffee. I guess I shouldn't reveal the ingredients of my famous torta until after they try it.

The true weight loss story

When I arrived in Chile, I was already underweight after a year with Kristin. I think I weighed 108lbs. In my first two months, I lost another 6lbs. In Chile, it is customary to welcome guests with food. It was constant bombardment. Try this. Eat this. Do you want seconds, thirds, fourths? I thought I had to try everything to be polite and started taking smaller portions so that I would have room for everything. Everywhere we went they handed me a plate of food stacked for a football player, and then they would bring ou
the next course. Even Joel would have had a challenge. After a while I realized that they were bothering me so much with more, more, more that I put myself on the defensive and was constantly saying no thank you. In the end, I ended up eating less than I wanted, less than normal, and less than I needed.

It finally came to a head in Chillan. Luckily, one night after dinner, Carola found me crying in my room. I had had to tell Teco seven times that “No, I did not want thirds, thank you.” I explained to her what was bothering me and she talked to Teco (and probably the rest of the population of Curicó). That is when things got better. They let me eat what and how much I wanted, and I became comfortable going into the kitchen to get a snack and asking for more without fear of pestilence.

Ever since, I have been working on eating well and normal, and I feel fine. Now, when people see me after being away awhile, I get comments on how fat I am becoming. "Oh Chelita, pareces más gordita que la ultima vez que te vi!" Chileans are just so obsessed with weight. Most of the women here are on crash diets that include skipping meals, but snacking and eating dessert, and even when they do eat a little, they complain all day about how they over did it. I just wish they would eat and be happy with themselves. Not a day goes by where I don’t hear about a new diet plan. Matias is on one this week. No carbohydrates for the boy who lives on bread, butter, and meat. Tío Pablo is trying to get him ready for New Zealand.

I started weighing myself once a week just to be sure that I am still on the right track. I now weigh about 105lbs (I redid the math this morning on a calculator). All their measurements are in kilos so I have to make adjustments so that I can understand. I still want to gain back about 10 lbs because that is where I felt normal. I started eating bread with cheese or peanut butter at tea time as extra nourishment to help out. You can’t imagine how weird it was to listen to Scarlett complain about how fat she had become when at her largest she only weighed about 118 lbs which is my norm.

Friday, January 9th

Maria and I made empanadas de queso for lunch. They are typically fried, but I asked to do some in the oven and they were great. The dough is really flaky and Matias ate two of my four all the while insisting that the fried version is better.

I wrapped up jelly belly beans for Monsi’s birthday gift. She, via Maca, had invited me over for “un térito con un pedacito de torta.” Thus, we were having a little tea party with a little cake. Monsi even started us right out by taking the first bite of cake, literally. This tradition is known as the mordita and the birthday girl really does take a bite out of the entire cake. After the birthday celebration, I helped Monsi ride her new bike through the halls and around the block. Then we settled in to watch "Buscando a Nemo" (Finding Nemo).

I had a good talk with Pablo, Isabel, and the other tíos. Pablo commented that I speak Spanish very well, but not enough, and admitted that it's different when he's here. Pablo and Isabel always invite me to sit and chat with them. I'm happy with Carola and Teco, but they never really want to talk. I've found that I've been spending a lot of extra time in the kitchen with the nana just for conversation’s sake. I jot down recipes and volunteer to help, but my offers are almost always denied. After all, allowing “la reina” (a pet name meaning “my queen”) to help in the kitchen would violate the unspoken social schism. I never knew how much I could miss washing my own dishes.

I will miss Pablo and Isabel's friendship when they leave. They treat me as an equal and think that Carola and Teco should do so as well because while I may never be a daughter in their eyes, we could be good friends.

I went over to Jessie's to see Teresa who is visiting from Talca and ended up watching “Bruce Almighty” with Jana, Jacquelyn,
and Emily. They made a sweet pickle cream cheese spread from Smuckers, Ohio and munched away, clenching their thirst with fruit juice bought specifically because they had no clue what the fruit was. We finished the movie shortly before midnight and I went in search of my sandals, clueless as to where I left them, in order to walk home. All of a sudden, my cell phone rings and Pablo is calling to find out where I am and if I'd like them to come pick me up. It was so nice, generous, and genuine that I started to cry. That's what parents do as they watch out for their kids. I can honestly tell Pablo that I love him tonight, but I'm not sure I could say it to Carola and Teco. A lot of times I still feel like their problem instead of their adopted daughter or even welcome guest. It's hard to define. I'm content and happy with my Chilean family and have definitely learned to love my brothers, but living with Pablo and Isabel the last two weeks, I realize how much I missing.

Saturday, January 10th

The tías and I went to Talca so they could order handmade, casera bikinis. It was neat seeing them pick out fabrics and styles to fit their tastes since I have never ordered anything handmade before. They ended up all wanting the same color. We just went for a few hours, but the car ride was interesting. Tía Pilar found out that her nine year old daughter had tried smoking so I got to hear a fierce Chilean reprimand. Then we laughed as she had to explain a girl’s period to the same nine year old. She is not shy at all and it was really fun listening to her explanation about how at a certain age, girls start popping eggs out once a month like a football.

The afternoon was taken up with more sunbathing, but today the garden was filled with little kids. All the aunts and uncle came over to relax and have fun. Maria brought out what was left of the carrot cake for once and Pilar loved it so much that she’s put in an order for her birthday party.

In the evening, Simone called to invite me to her goodbye asado. We looked at her photos, prepared the ensaladas, and snacked on warm bread and brie cheese. I was reminded of AP French class. Her family had a really cool brainteaser, but they were a little anxious to show me the secret. I did pretty well from the start and would have liked to figure it out on my own, but it was fun anyway. When the party started, I talked the evening away with a girl from Talca as the guys took turns singing, playing guitar, and manning the grill. The meat was very tasty, juicy and well spiced with garlic, salt, and beer for a marinade.

Sunday, January 11th

I baked chocolate chip cookies before and during lunch so that I’d have something to take with me as a hostess gift when I visited Sergio and Tía Pati. I poured in the whole bag of chocolate before realizing that Mom had sent me a bulk package. I like the normal amount of chips much better than the double recipe, but I didn't get any other complaints so who am I to complain.

In the afternoon, I took the train to Santiago loaded down with my gym bag, two sleeping bags (one for me and one for Jen), my laptop, my tote, and a bag of welcome chocolate from Buvi. Luckily, I met Enan, the son of a friend of Pablo’s who was more than happy to help me out. He’s a Chilean fireman with the greatest green eyes that I’ve ever seen. He also made casual inquiries about my boyfriend status. Jen’s plane arrived an hour late, but I got to watch the golden sunset over the mountains from the airport lobby. Poor Jen arrived exhausted and what little Spanish she knew flew right out the window. I had to translate everything, but Sergio’s son Felipe speaks English very well after spending time with all his previous host siblings and enjoyed showing off his stuff. He also loved the chocolate chip cookies that I brought along. We started out with four dozen and there are only a handful left.
Monday, January 12th

On Jen’s first day in Chile, we spoke a lot more English than I had imagined. She doesn’t know hardly any Spanish and we started with teatime food items and a few simple questions:

*Puedo*- can I?
*Qué*- what?
*Cómo*- come again?

We basically stayed at home, relaxing all day at Sergio and Tia Pati’s house. Jen shared her photo books from home and even brought a cookbook with pictures which gave her brownie points in my eyes. We watched Gilmore Girls which is her sister’s favorite TV show and “Save the Last Dance.”

I’m afraid that she’s going to have a hard time in Chile. Buvi and Carola are really going to have something to talk about now. They are still convinced that I eat too little, and Jen may eat a third of my consumption, being optimistic that is.

I spent the afternoon as Sergio’s secretary, calling all the exchange students about our trip north. What a waste of time! I called over thirty numbers and talked to only six students. Jen and I took the subway home and she was marked as a gringa right away. Someone claiming to be an American studying here in Santiago wanted to borrow money in a dire emergency. However, she was suspiciously Chilean as she wheeled and dealt with the ticket lady for a student rate. Luckily, she gave up and we escaped.

Tuesday, January 13th

I went for a pre-breakfast jog in Santiago and noticed that a lot of men were bicycling to work in their suits and ties, and the women wore tennis shoes along with their skirts to help ease the commute. How practical. Upon my return, I discovered a terrace above our apartment where we hang towels. It’s very peaceful up there.

Jen and I talked a lot. She now knows: *Cómo durmiste?* (How did you sleep?), *Cómo amaneciste?* (How are you this morning?), *Tomaste desayuno?* (Did you have breakfast), and *Quieres ducharte?* (Do you want to shower?). Another episode of the Gilmore Girls finished our morning and we helped Tía Pati make lots and lots and lots of pasta.

Felipe didn’t have summer classes in the afternoon so Jen and I went with him and a cousin to visit Santa Lucia (the castle on a hill) where we acquired some unwanted followers. Felipe was very watchful and we played “stop and go” until the suspicious guys got bored and left. Then we walked to the Plaza de Armas where a lot of painters displayed their art before stopping at Bravissimo for ice cream cones. Once again I should remind myself that one flavor is more than enough, but I couldn’t resist trying both the black forest and the banana split.

After tea time, Sergio took us to the nunnery. Jen and I couldn’t enter the cloister, because we were neither doctors nor nuns, and besides we were dressed scandalously in shorts and tank tops, but we toured the special church where no ordinary Chileans are allowed and greeted the Reverend Mother. The return trip was roundabout, but we saw breathtaking views of Santiago at night. We also saw former dictator Pinochet’s house. The formidable cement wall surrounding the grounds coincides well with his dubious legacy and the prevalence of security lights and cameras betrays the ambiguity of his reception in Chiulean society and culture.

Note: Since I’ve arrived in Santiago, we have had the same thing for breakfast and dinner every day: bread, milk, jam, coffee,
tea, juice, ham and cheese or palta. I think I’ll need a bread free period to recoup. A day or two should do it.

Wednesday, January 14th

I practiced my Tae Kwon Do on the patio. I felt like reviewing my skills since we've already had two interesting encounters with creepy guys. Dripping with sweat, I then checked mail, chatted with Mom and Mike, and watched the news.

Jen and I spent the afternoon at the mall where we discovered Yozun Fruz frozen yogurt. It was really tasty. I asked the guy working the counter, who seemed to like gringas and spoke very good English, what flavor was best and he made me his favorite without further question: cherimoya, mora, y frambuesa. It was a fabulous blend of raspberry, blackberry, and cherimoya. We also visited Casa & Ideas, and I fell in love with yet another housing store. I bought flowery pot holders with bright Chilean colors. I thought they would make a cool gift, but Jen convinced me that many would not share my fascination with kitchenware. Her look said, “What are you thinking!” I almost bought a bowl too, and spent forever finding the perfect one, but finally decided it looked too much like my FiestaWare bowl from home.

Thursday, January 15th

Tae Kwon Do can really make a person sore after a big break. I ache.

Jen and I walked to the plazas in the afternoon. The first security guy on horseback did a triple take at the smiling blond. He was very interested. When I told him that she didn't speak Spanish, the instant response was “Can’t you translate for her?” He was very insistent, but I was not about to start a bilingual telephone service. I liked the second patrol man better. He told funny stories of tourists asking for directions with unhelpful list of “helpful Spanish phrases.” I had a great time chatting with that one.

Carola and Teco arrived in Santiago today, but were too tired to come visit us. I think that's really sad for Jen's sake. So far her Chilean family has shown no interest in her, and Carola has even threatened not to host her if Matias doesn't get placed with a family soon. That's a little cold. They don't even want to bother picking us up next week to take her suitcases home. They’d rather Sergio make an extra trip home and then take us back to the bus station. That's after Carola arranged for us to spend a week of organized sightseeing in Santiago so that Pablo or Buvi couldn't bring her home to Curicó. We spent most of our days in the house anyway.

Luckily, we get along well. We played Nertz and Speed on the terrace while watching the lightning, tasted Tia Pati's pan budín, a bread pudding with apple, orange peel, nutmeg, eggs, milk, cinnamon, and old bread. We also swung in the park which is one of Jen’s favorite activities. We had leftovers for lunch. Tía Pati was scandalized to suggest it because they normally pitch leftovers here, but I wasn’t complaining. The spaghetti was great yesterday, but she lessened her own shocking behavior by preparing a second option, pasta tortilla, which is basically macaroni and egg cooked into a pancake shape.

Today I discovered that avocados grow on trees.

Friday, January 16th

Ouch! It took lots of willpower to get me out of bed and barefooted on the terrace for Tae Kwon Do practice. I didn't know I could get this sore. Then I chatted with Mom and Dad and a few of my friends online before helping Tía Pati make pastel de choco
**Pastel de Choclo**

**Corn Casserole**

- 1lb hamburger
- 2 onions (diced)
- 1 clove garlic
- ½ c raisins
- chili powder
- 2 shredded chicken breasts (cooked)
- 1 hard boiled egg (chopped)
- sugar

- 5 ears corn
- 1 c milk
- 1c chicken broth (divided)
- 2 T fresh basil
- salt

-Brown hamburger, onions, and garlic. Add raisins, ½ c chicken broth, and chili powder. Simmer 2 min. Pour mixture into bottom of 8 x 8 baking dish.

-Top with chicken and egg.

-Remove corn kernels from ears and place in blender. Add milk, ½ c chicken broth, basil, and salt. Blend well and then pour mixture into sauce pan. Cook the mixture on medium heat until the corn appears semi-translucent.

-Pour corn mixture over meat. Bake until toasted (about 30min). For a glazed surface, sprinkle the top with sugar before putting the casserole in the oven.

We hooked up with Taylor in the afternoon and met the world's tallest Chilean at the governor's office. We figured it must be his German blood because he towered over his compatriots. Taylor had broken his braces this morning, but luckily their was a very nice dentist in the Santiago Rotary club that squeezed him in and fixed the problem for free. After our spur of the moment dentist visit, we discovered an artisan village called Los Dominicanos. I bought four bracelets and would love to go back with more time and money. It was odd translating every other sentence for Jen, but Taylor and I didn't revert to the easy way. It was actually funny watching Taylor gets stuck in his native language.

Jana, Emily, and Jessie were waiting for us at Sergio and Tía Pati's house when we got home. Jessie had brought me a birthday present from my family that arrived after I left town, the shirt and cap I had forgotten in my room, and a surprise present from Buvi. She deserved a big hug for being such a good friend!

While I was waiting for Mom and Dad to call, I couldn't contain the anticipation and opened my presents ahead of time. After all, Jen informed me that it had already been my birthday for fifteen hours in New Zealand. She had given me a New Zealand bone carving and a birthday card with a Maori blessing inside. These special pendants can't be bought. They're only given as gifts. Katie also sent me jewelry, having picked out a gorgeous necklace that fits right in with the Chilean fashion. It has three strings of reddish golden amber stones with gold bangles creating a sparkle in between. Dad sent froggy boxers imported from South Carolina and the “ribbit” glows in the dark. By the time my family finally called, it was 11:30 at night. We were still talking when the clock struck midnight, and they wished me my very first official Happy Birthday. My exchange student friends leapt up screaming when they realized the time and tackled me with hugs and warm wishes. Jen, Jana, and I talked until about 3am with lots of sleepy laughter. We can’t wait to start out on our fourth Rotary excursion.

**Saturday, January 17th**

Happy birthday to me on four hours of sleep! I started my birthday with a six hour bus ride to La Serena. I felt so special as my cell phone started ringing off the hook. My Chilean family hadn't forgotten me and I received many birthday calls. Buvi even sang Happy Birthday in English with her adorable Chilean accent.

We're staying at a low budget boarding school which would make an ideal set for a horror story orphanage. The rooms are stark and empty with cold metal bed frames, thin mattresses, bare cupboards, cold water, and dirty floors. We did resort to singing "It's a hard knock life," from Annie, but we survived.
We spent the afternoon at the beach which did wonders to recharge my batteries. Jen took bikini pictures for all those doubting Thomases back home while I laid out on my new beach towel (Buvi’s birthday gift). I also walked along the beachfront, blustered by the sand and wind and watching out for jellyfish. Vichu, Ernesto’s son, came with me, made up the Spanish equivalent for jellyfish, gelea del mar, and promised me a birthday ice cream.

When we got back to our towels, I found that Jen had made me a birthday cake by tracing patterns in the sand. In all honesty, it was Britt’s idea for which she got her own hug, and I had to blow out the candles while they both watched. Tía Pati and Sergio also pulled their funds to buy me a pineapple birthday cake with real whip cream frosting. Mmm..... It was yummy and I got to keep the candles as a memory after standing up front and listening to my friends sing happy birthday in Spanish, English, and German. After my second piece of cake, I piled into a taxi and drove to the cine to watch “The Last Samurai.” We were late and the movie had already started, but Vichu and I still went running for ice cream. McDonalds provided a manjar cookie McSwing and we were set.
to go back in our free time to shop. According to Ernesto, I also need to try fresh mango juice and artisan ice cream. The plaza is the prettiest I’ve seen with palm trees, fountains, gazebos, flowered arbors, and a clock tower.

We spent another afternoon at the beach. Our first stop reeked of dead fish and was covered in trash, but Rotary quickly realized their mistake and we kept going. The ocean was calm and I could see to the bottom. Jen and I paddled about and I discovered that my striped jogging top works perfectly to cover my bikini if I actually want to play. I even won a free lime soda by crossing the monkey bars of a promotional obstacle course set up on the sand.

I spent a few hours nursing Sarah with Carrie, Naomi, and Kathryn. We held the bucket and her hair as she threw up and told stories to distract her from feeling miserable. Later, I joined a bunch of the guys of the beach to sing praise songs. Taylor had his guitar and we worshipped under the stars as the waves crashed. It was fantastic experience and very moving. I was especially moved as a giant cockroach climbed my leg during the middle of a chorus. Bugs don't bother me, but unfortunately, I thought it was a spider, and they do. "Shout to the Lord" took on a different meaning and my sudden scream earned me a good laugh from my friends. Then we kept singing. We all got back a little after curfew, but the counselors weren’t worried because if Taylor and I were involved, what trouble could we be in?

Tuesday, January 20th

Rotary kept us entertained on the long bus ride to San Pedro de Atacama with a cheesy Jackie Chan romance and “Catch Me If You Can.” They must've read the babysitters handbook on pacifying kids with television. The other movies in our repertoire include: “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” “Changing Lanes,” “The Sweetest Thing,” “The Lord of the Rings,” “The Curse of the Black Pearl,” and “Pocahontas” (the only one in Spanish). Talk about TV overload! I must admit that I didn't watch them all. I spent a good deal of time chatting and reading the Chronicles of Narnia.

The desert is gorgeous, filthy, and disgusting all at the same time. I loved watching the changing colors in the rocks as we drove along. The Pacific ocean bordered the left side of the highway and the mountains stretched out on our right. I took more pictures than you can imagine of the pretty rocks, but really they were just dirty rocks, sand and rocks. To make things worse, sanitation laws in Chile aren't very strict and at random intervals truckloads of trash appeared on the desert floor. I am now fully convinced that I couldn't live in a place without grass and trees. I missed the green and had to laugh as our guide pointed out "the tree" of a small city because there was just one.

We trekked through La Valle de Martes. Ironically, it was Tuesday, but the red rocks were named after the red planet, not the day of the week. The valley is also known as La Valle de los Muertos because there’s no life. It was sandy like the beach and even though it burned our feet, it was easier to carry my sandals than try to shuffle along. I took more pictures around every corner and saw my first example of sand boarding. Nicolas (Belgium) wanted to see if his snowboarding skills would measure up, but it was a private group lesson so he wasn’t allowed to try. We climbed out of the canyon with flying sand blasting us like needles backs bent and eyes closed.

We watched the sunset at the entrance to La Valle de la Luna. Unfortunately, the group split up and we missed the chance to visit
the valley itself. The Rotary counselors were very unhappy and began to treat us like children. I had to translate all our instructions into English on the bus microphone “to avoid further confusion.” I didn't mind helping, but I didn't want to be singled out on the Rotary’s side. Truth is that it's easier for Rotary to say we don't understand them than to admit that their instructions are unclear. They have a habit of changing their minds and informing a few of us, instead of making all of us aware of the change in plans. In Chile and in most Hispanic cultures, it’s unusual for someone to admit that they’re wrong. In fact, they have a special verb tense for passing on the blame. Instead of saying “I forgot it. (Yo lo olvidé.),” they say, “It forgot itself for me. (Se me olvidó).” Thus “I broke it” or “I dropped it” are automatically switched to “It broke itself for me’ and “It dropped itself for me.”

Tonight we had to set up our own tents and found out quickly who among us were campfire girls and campfire boys. There weren’t many, but living rustic certainly has its charms. The stars were amazing away from the city, filling the night sky with tiny pinpricks of light, and I actually saw one fall. Naturally, I made a wish.

Wednesday, January 21st
I'm exhausted with only an average of five hours of sleep a night, but this morning we had a 4am wakeup call to see the geysers. The road to the top was crazy and we were officially shaked, rattled, and rolled as we bumped along. Sometimes, the van actually left the road so that we could drive in the smoother desert. The altitude wasn’t any friendlier at 4600 m. Kelly fainted on the way up, Jacquelyn fainted on the way down, and Kara fainted at the top. It was freezing cold in the early morning air and we wrapped up in our beach towels for extra warmth. The guides actually put our breakfast milk in the boiling geysers to heat up, but as soon as we ate our sandwiches (both ham and cheese that day) or fruit cake, we headed back down to prevent any more swoonings. Only one of the poor girls was caught before she hit the ground. Thank goodness Taylor was on hand to manage that catching!

Next stop: Las termas de Puritama. In the middle of dirt and rocks, we came upon a valley filled with tall grass and a running stream. It took a bit of effort to convince ourselves that the water would be warmer than it looked, but although it wasn't exactly bath water, it felt good, and the current acted as natural massage therapy. We saw vicuña (llama relatives) and biscoti (rabbit-ish kangaroo impersonators).

I found three alpaca scarves and a volcanic rock nativity at the feria. They also had gourd carvings identical to what I bought at the Smithsonian Institute in eighth grade. I think Carola and Teco will like them even though they're not technically from the north. Teco called to see how we were doing and apologized for winning a polo match instead of calling me on my birthday.

Later, we visited a quarry where they mine volcanic rock for bricks, pillars, statues, etc. Below, we walked through an oasis that was made up of a labyrinth of little farms including membrillo, figs, and corn. A stream ran through the shady path creating a idyllic hideaway.

Next we drove to the salar where the melting of glaciers had left an entire valley full of salt. There's just one kind of tree with deep enough roots to find water in this landscape and
it’s not exactly growing in abundance. We stopped to visit “The flamingo lagoon,” a bird conservatory that the Chileans had established in that old seabed. The path was made of pure salt polished by the tread of many feet and the salt flats spread out for acres around us. There was one shallow pool off in the distance and it was hard to see the flamingos in the fading light, but they took off as the sun set and we were awed.

We had veggies for dinner. It was great! Taylor worked on the last eight pieces of chicken, and I cleaned up the broccoli, peas, carrots, and corn. We made a good team.

Thursday, January 22nd

Chuquicamata is the second biggest open-air copper mine in the world. Originally owned and operated by Americans, Allende nationalized the mine during his brief presidency in an attempt to keep the wealth generated by the mineral in Chile. The site is still owned and operated by the National Copper Corporation.

Every hour Chuquicamata uses enough electricity to power the entire city of Santiago for a week, and every day enough water passes through the mine to supply the city for two weeks. The trucks they use were so huge that a full-sized pickup looks like a remote-controlled toy, complete with pop-up flag for visibility. Jen’s really interested in science so while I was thinking, "Wow! Big Hole!" she was thinking, "How many moles of acid do they use in the purifying solution and what's the percentage of ore to sulfuric rock?" I was flabbergasted by her interest and racked my mental muscles to translate the questions for our guide.

We passed a few hours in the mall to put us back on schedule. It was a nice idea, but I had to casually ditch Taylor in the CD shop because I needed some time to myself. I felt miserable and had given away all my Tylenol. That’s what happens when I’m the only one to think ahead and bring headache medicine for an entire busload of students. I really missed Mom as I stoically survived the day. I just wanted to sit on her and feel loved, soaking in her presence. I wanted someone to hold me until I felt better.

Jen bought new jeans and changed in the bathroom so we almost had a police encounter. Luckily, she had kept the receipt.

Jen, Teresa, and I watched the changing colors of sunset over the ocean before heading to the asado. The Rotary President of Antofagasta hosted us all in his home. By the time we finally headed home, we were all exhausted and drooping.

Friday, January 23rd

We slept until 11am! It was so nice. The fatigue is still present but not nearly as paralyzing. I hung out in Taylor’s room listening to his guitar and singing praise songs in the morning.

Hornitos was a fun beach. I was going to lie out and rest, but couldn't resist the call of the ocean, especially since it will be a long time before I can hop through the waves again. The water was rejuvenating and all my energy returned as I crossed the breakage point, relaxed, and swam. Taylor checked on me twice just to make sure I was okay since I was out there so long. The tricky part was watching out for the giant jellyfish. Many of the other exchange students were stung by the giant goo balls. They were huge, easily a foot and a half in diameter and colored a pretty pink. I went out past the break point so that I could see them in the clear water before they surprised me. Hermit crabs and machas also covered the sandy bottom. In fact, there was so much sand that it actually got in between the layers of my swimsuit (I
mean bikini). Teco asked if I was using it when he called today to check in. We also played beach Frisbee.

Naomi cut her hair yesterday and Kelly chopped Catherine's tonight. I remember the feeling of initial euphoria when I first cut mine and I hope that their happiness lasts.

Saturday, January 24th

Free day and I'm back on schedule. I was out and about at 8am so I had the chance to read The Chronicles of Narnia and stretch for three hours until my friends woke. Jen, Jessie and I headed to the center where I bought carved pumpkins as gifts and bargained two luka off the price. We also walked through the supermarket and sat in the plaza sharing about our families.

I tried fresh mango juice at Ernesto's suggestion, but was very disappointed. I was half afraid that it was going to make me sick. Luckily, the artisan ice cream more than made up for it. I had banana split and pistachio. I taught Teresa, Jessie, and Jen to play euchre to pass a few hours, and then Jessie and I hit the beach for the last time. We walked along the rocks looking for tidal pools. My sandals weren't the smartest thing to wear, but I survived. We found sea urchins, anemones, fish, crabs, a cross between a starfish and a jellyfish, and "spitting cosas verdes." We assumed that these unidentifiable green things must be some kind of shellfish that spouted water. If we could have added music and lights, it would have been a quite a spectacle. I picked out three striped shells as keepsakes.

We arrived at dinner to find French fries, fried eggs, and steak. I was not happy and almost cried as the greasy oil pooled (literally pooled) on my plate. I really need to learn to go with the flow better, but it's still hard to convince myself that one day of gross food won't kill me. I soaked up a bunch of the grease with napkins and ate the fries and eggs after adding lots more salt. I must admit they weren't that bad, but luckily, Susan had bought a McSalad at McDonalds and didn't want her corn and lettuce. I was more than happy to help her out.

Sunday, January 25th

Of all places, I met Pelao in a gas station three hours south of La Serena. It was nice to see my friend's face and I received lots of real warm hugs. His family had just spent their vacation in La Serena.

Taylor and I had a serious conversation on the bus about dating, marriage, and God's will. He was reading a book about courtship and I was amazed that my worries showed up word for word. We both had/have relationships with best friends back home and don't know where things will go when we return.

The homecoming was fantastic! On the bus the excitement mounted and I can't imagine how I'll feel in May when I'm looking forward to seeing my real family. I had twenty-seven e-mails and twenty-two birthday cards waiting for me as well as birthday presents from my host family. I got the cutest pink froggy toe socks, a black shirt with an “S” embroidered in scarlet for Shelly, a darling jacket with a blue teddy bear, and a sporty red shirt. I was very impressed and felt very loved. The boys were hanging around to see my photos and presents so I gave out cookies from my stash and Carola and I chatted for a long time about her trip to Ohio. She found American breakfasts huge, coffee before dinner strange, no desert strange, and ranch dressing very tasty, but fattening. I guess Mom and Dad spoke too fast to be easily understood.

After a dubious beginning and two weeks in Chile, Jen finally got to meet her host family. She was tired after our long bus ride which didn't help any with her mood or with her Spanish skills, but she stuck close to me and the Correas welcomed her with hugs. The family also loved the photos and the gifts that she brought from New Zealand: chocolate, pins, and coins. Matias also received a present in finding out the name of the city where he will be living in New Zealand.
Monday, January 26th

It was a very emotional morning. I woke early, excited to read my e-mails, but when I opened my file, all the notes I had saved from my family had disappeared. All the sweet words of encouragement and Christmas wishes were gone. I was shocked and dismayed and all Matias could say was, “Well, you can't save everything.” It turns out that he had erased them all to speed up the computer so he could play a new game. I couldn't help but cry. Luckily, there's a silver lining behind every cloud and I discovered that Teco can give really good hugs. He was very sorry and enfolded me in his arms, letting me sob until the wound healed. It was almost like having Mom there. I let the emails go because after all is said and done, they're just words. I know without written proof that my family loves me.

Agusta invited us for lunch in her campo. Her family all speaks both English and Spanish since they have vacation houses in England, Spain, and Chile. What a life! We played Marco Polo in the pool and my age started to show as I quickly tired of 15-year-old fun and jokes. Later, we explored her yard filled with peacocks and fruit trees, but were unable to find the river. For lunch, we had a typical Chilean dish almost like stew with corn, carrots, potatoes, onions, and beef. I really liked it. Agusta’s aunt also makes homemade jam and we tried the red peach and apricot varieties for tea. Fabulous stuff! To top it all off, Jen got to try her first banana milk, perfectly natural without sugar, and Chilean fruitcake.

Tuesday, January 27th

Jen and I have been spending a lot of time together. Until Matias leaves, we have to share a room and the space is a little cramped for two, but we are making do without much struggle. Although I must admit that this is a good lesson in patience in case I have a messy college roommate in the future. We have a lot in common, including a love of reading, an unreasonable dislike for our Chilean wiener dog, Helga, and we both trip at the exact same spot on the sidewalk. We have yet to disagree, although that's not too surprising since whenever I ask her opinion she "doesn't mind."

Either way is fine with her. We get along as if we had known each other since diapers and have already started planning "Gringa Sisters" t-shirts. She also gives the greatest hugs. We just seem to mold together, and it's a lot of fun snuggling down on the couch to a Disney movie or singing Christmas carols in the car in February. She knows most of my favorite carols from car commercials in New Zealand.

I went to the pool for the first time in two weeks, organized my photos, wrote an update, and answered my email before lunch. I didn't know that Hotmail has an email limit, but I accidentally sent the update twice and outstretched my limit I was bummed because I wanted to talk to Mom about something. To make myself feel better, I opened all my birthday cards. They were fantastic, full of notes of encouragement and sweet words. My room is now covered in cards. I boxed up the rest of Caro’s knickknacks to make enough room.

We took Jen to the dentist and the Polo club before heading to Lago Vichuken. Maca, Monsi, and Krystle (a friend of Pepe’s from Australia) were waiting for us there. Jen and Krystle had a blast comparing words and pastimes from home. For the moment, Jen is my living shadow. It’s her only sign of nerves and she seems to be doing well. I don't think the copycat will last for long, at least I hope not.

Wednesday, January 28th

It was a very relaxing day at the beach. I had about an hour and a half to breakfast and work on my novel before the others stirred. I also found out that Lupe and Marcela, the nanas, are very
nice and personable. Lupe’s daughter, Carolina, is also a great companion for Monsi.

Krystle is nice too, but she seems a bit fake. Her stories seem too good to be true and I don’t quite share her gumption for gossip. I escaped for a while into the sunshine and scanned my Taste of Home magazine that had been delivered to Chile while I was up north. It was odd checking all the recipes for ingredients that could be found in Chile, but I found quite a few promising prospects, desserts mostly.

I did get to swim, even though the clouds and wind made things rather chilly. We also ignored the temperature in order to try artisan ice cream. The cones are homemade and kept in a freezer for quick service. I still don’t like the Chilean chocolate sauce, but the lucuma manjar ice cream was great. I have no idea what lucuma is, but it tastes kind of like a nutty caramel.

I was too tired to politely tolerate Chilean drunks and smoke so I didn't go out with Pepe, Krystle, and Jen tonight. Carola was disappointed. She thinks I'll be bored, or boring, if I don't go out all the time like Caro did, but I'd rather be happy. It was fun visiting the neighbors and playing Sequence instead.

The food at the lake is great. Today we had tacos with lemon juice, lettuce, chicken, palta, and mayo wrapped in a warm tortilla and kuchen. It was either peach or plum. The debate is still on, but either way, it was definitely worth sneaking in for an extra bite in the kitchen.

Today may or may not have been Jen's lucky day. She fell down the stairs and got stung by a bee, but then again, she did manage to win twice at Farkle.

Thursday, January 29th

Jen and I went walking along the shoreline in search of an elusive mulberry tree, which turned out to be a type of pinecone instead. Only one of the houses had vicious biting dogs, but the owner turned out to be a family friend and invited us in for juice and a chat. We stayed for over half an hour. Nicole's host sister was sunning while we talked and informed us that Nicole plans to stay in Ohio for two more weeks. She had to return unexpectedly for a family funeral. I can't imagine going home and then having to come back to Chile. We were parched and tired as we got back, but dutifully set out to find our missing family. The neighbors sent us on a wild goose chase from house to house and up a mountain of stairs. Eventually, we just decided to wait for them at home.

The nanas have named me the regalona (the pet) of the kitchen. I wake up and have my breakfast with them, usually chatting for quite a while before going to work on my novel. Yesterday I made pastel de choclo for lunch and I loved it so much that I had them share the recipe. The kids don't like it at all, so I guess I'll never see it in our house. At night, they made an ensalada of shredded carrots just for me. They heard that I didn't like plain lettuce or tomatoes. We also had grilled fish. Corbina tastes more like meat than fish. You have to chew it well and it leaves you quickly satisfied, a cross between steak and chicken.

Lindsey and Jacqueline came to visit and we planned to go tubing until the boat key fell in the water. I tried windsurfing, but the sail was too heavy. My muscles burned from wrestling the plastic out of the water. In the end, I had to give up. Teco took us for a spin in the lancha. Even though the waves were rough, the powerful boat made the ride smooth. Pepe informed me that I had to go to the disco tonight since I skipped out yesterday. Neither Krystle nor Jen had fun at the disco last night, but I agreed. If they were all going, I might as well tag along. Luckily, his friends were grounded and we played Laberinto instead, which I recognized as Manipulation, a form of Rummicube with cards.
Laberinto

-This game requires one deck of cards for two or three players, two decks of cards for four to six players, etc.
-Each player starts with three cards.
-On his turn, a player may either draw another card or play a card or cards on the table, he may not do both. If the player has already laid down his initial three cards, he may add to his own pile or the piles of other players. Cards may be taken from current piles on the table to be used in new piles, if in taking the card the pile still contains at least three cards in a sequence or three of a kind.
-To lay down initially, a player must have a set of at least three cards of the same face value or a run of at least three cards in the same suit.
-The player who plays all his cards on the table wins.

We visited Lindsey for her birthday, bearing the typical Chilean present: chocolate. She ate half of it in one sitting while boasting/admitting that she had fulfilled her bet with Kyla at the disco last night. Slightly tipsy, she had acquired seven new kissing conquests, bringing her exchange statistics to fourteen.

Teco finally understood that “prefiero estar fome y feliz que bien chilena y discontenta.” In other words, I’d rather be boring and happy than properly Chilean and unhappy. That’s why I stayed home and Farkled with the kids instead of going out. Tonight's discotec experience didn’t include dancing anyway. It was really just a pub to chat, smoke, and get drunk in. I had no interest, and felt satisfied with my choice. I'm not asking Chilean life to change for me, just asking to choose the life I live in Chile.

Friday, January 30th

Sometimes I really wish I could sleep in. I woke up around 8:30 like normal, but I was exhausted, and try as I might, I couldn't go back to sleep. An hour later, I decided it was wasted effort and just got up.

Jen, the boys, and I piled into the back of the truck and headed to Llico with Carola and Teco. I found my very first limpets on the beach and gather souvenirs thinking of home and "The Incredible Mr. Limpet." Dad would've been amused. Seagulls swamped the beach as the fishermen gutted their wares to sell fresh out of the water. Gundi spent a lot of time with the gringas, poking at crabs, petting horses, and running along the surf in search of skittish gulls.

Saturday, January 31st

This morning, I was on a roll with my novel and didn't want to stop writing. It was flowing easily and I think I may end the first chapter. I have 17 pages, more or less.

We dived from the bank and I showed off to the Chilean macho guys on skis. They quickly learned that all gringas aren’t flojeras, and I received many compliments. Later, my family taught me a new game, Karioka, which is the Chilean form of Phase 10. Carola joked that she would expel me if I didn't pass her good cards, but in the end she decided to keep me anyway.

This afternoon, the nanas posed with me for some photos. I've really enjoyed getting to know them, and I'd like to visit Lupe in the future. She’s Maca’s full time nana so I can walk across the street to see her whenever I want. I had leftover kuchen for breakfast, really good fried congrio for lunch, and a scrumptious brazo de reina topped off the once comida, a mix of tea time and supper.
I taught Maxi how to play Nertz and he kept begging me to play all afternoon and into the evening. Jen joined us for Nertz and 31. She was exhausted after only two hours of sleep and lots of swimming.

Sunday, February 1st
Poor Maxi is bored stiff without Gundi. Every five seconds, he appears over my shoulder, begging to play another game, but after Farkle, Nertz, and Karioka even I have had enough. We swam together for a bit, but he got tired long before I did. I ended up splashing around for fifty-five minutes, stopping on occasion to climb out and dive from the shore line into the water. Luckily, the water is ten feet or deeper right up to the break wall with a good five or six foot difference between the yard and the water. Carola was joking that I’m getting lazy with all this rest and relaxation.

Jen and I put together a puzzle, played ping-pong, and chatted with Krystle. We had to remake our beds because the nana stripped all the sheets before Carola decided to stay until tomorrow morning in an attempt to avoid the weekend traffic.

Monday, February 2nd
Maxi got car sick for the first time in his life, which delayed our return, but Carola and I had a good conversation as we drove along.

When we got home, Jen and I had to fight with Matias for an hour a piece on the computer (even though he'd been playing all morning, returned after lunch, and played until bedtime). Otherwise, we got our room back in order, declared war on an ant invasion, visited Jessie, and made corn bread. Note to self: when replacing buttermilk with the normal variety, you have to use a lot less milk. I ended up making a double batch because the batter was so soupy to start out. It’s edible, but still not great.

I received a Christmas package from Christine, the German exchange student who lived in my house last year. It contained a Christmas card to add to my collection, German chocolates, and a book of life wishes. She translated the German sayings in separate little notes that accompanied each photo and it was adorable. I read the whole thing through, but it’s the kind of book you should read a page at a time to truly think about the meaning of the words. She deserves a good long e-mail.

Tuesday, February 3rd
I woke up early to use the Internet without bothering Matias, as we had discussed, but low and behold, he roused himself at the same time to play Tibia. Grrr…. I ended up jogging and practicing my Tae Kwon Do instead. The garden is just large enough for the forms and I had fun trying to control my movements so that I could maintain the technique and not run into any walls.

Mom called because she missed the sound of my voice. We talked about the five or six placement tests I have to take the first week I get back, my summer job, and our vacation plans. Canada is a sure bet and Mom ordered a Maine guidebook and triptick in case we want to take a detour on the way home. It would be a mother-daughter venture since Katie is opposed to anything that resembles serious hiking and Dad has no interest since there are no fish involved. Mom's really excited for my college plans and wants to go shopping for “must haves” with the gift certificates I left her from graduation. I see new socks, underwear, sheets, and a pillow coming my way, requested in bright cheery colors.

Carola took Jen and me on a tour of the center by car. We drove up the hill where I had made my Rocky run and walked through both the mercado and the bulk store with yummy results: almond extract to make cookies, mole for lunch tomorrow, coconut for a Chilean sweet, and baking powder for all good things in general. We've got lots of fresh fruits and veggies which were prepared how I liked them and ended up with six ensaladas for lunch. Carola also opened the Ranch dressing that they had brought back from the US.
Teco took us to San Fernando to see polo. The field was behind an important vineyard and I climbed through a hole in the fence and trekked across the fields to reach the bodega bathrooms. I sank over my ankles in mud and had to wash myself off in a dirty stream before I could cross the threshold. I decided just to take the long road on the way back, but two men from the bodega saw me walking and drove me all the way to the polo fields. It would have taken forever on my own.

Wednesday, February 4th
Jen and I made apple dumplings for tea and Kristin came over for pan con palta with yummy dessert. Jen’s getting back into her snacking groove with our loose dinner schedule and seems much more content with two dumplings, an apple, and peanut butter bread instead of a meal. She wasn’t impressed with the texture of Buvi’s all-natural sugar-free peanut butter so I think I’m still stuck finishing it myself, but Carola bought really good whole grain bread (pan integral) to go with it. Mmmmm….

I did manage to write some in my novel, but it's harder here. Maxi wanted to play Nertz, Matias needed help with his visa forms, and Carola and I spent lots of time just chatting. I think we've grown more comfortable, if not closer, in the last week.

In the afternoon, Jen and I explored the center on foot, venturing into areas that even I’ve never been. She was most interested in the artisan ice cream. The scooper took us for a native with her gringa cousin. Hurray for me and my Spanish skills!

Thursday, February 5th
We were boring today. Carola, Teco, and Matias went to Santiago to take care of his visa papers so Jen and I took advantage of the extra computer time. I also organized my laptop photos, wrote letters to the grandparents which are long overdue, worked several hours on my book, watched Gilmore Girls, and played Nertz with Maxi.

Carola said that I can have a Happy Birthday Shelly / Welcome Jen to Chile tea party next week, but it sounds like we're heading out again on the 15th of February. Buvi wants all the family to get together at a big country house. Carola is sure she won't be able to go with all the last minute details for Matias, and we're supposed to have a send off party sometime, but I believe Jen, the boys, and I are all going with the grandparents. Who knows for how long? I'll just take my laptop along and have no worries.

Friday, February 6th
Maxi and I have developed a system. He likes to go early to tennis practice with the little kids so we head out together at 10:25. After dropping him off, I take advantage of the pool before swim classes start, hurry home to shower, and then returned to pick him up. Today I had a fellow swimmer. A big, fat rat was doing laps in the pool and it took two gardeners with a net and a rake to get him out. Helga got to go swimming too, but she wasn’t nearly as happy about it as the boys were. I think Maxi was as wet as she was after her bath.

Jana joined us to visit the campo where we sunned, swam, and read. We also talked a lot, like girls do, and made plans to see “The Hulk” at midnight. The cultural center has open-air theater throughout the summer and plastic chairs fill the square. We assumed the voices would be English with subtitles, but the entire movie was in Spanish. I understood almost all, except for the genetic mumbo-jumbo. Poor Jen just had to study the cinematography and we both decided that it was a bad movie. The plot was weak with lots of action and destruction, and the military intelligence kept bringing out more guns even though they had already been proven useless. In a few weeks, they’ll show “El Señor de los Anillos” and I’d like to go see “The Lord of the Rings” in Spanish.
Saturday, February 7th

What a wonderful day!

I talked to Laura, Mike, and my family all in one day. First, Mike woke up early on a Saturday morning just to chat. From his recent e-mail, I had suspected as much so I signed on as well. He's such a good guy and he makes me happy even from a continent away. I glowed for the rest of the day. Then Katie got on to chat and rumor has it she was giggling away. It sure was fun.

We had guests for lunch and leftover salpicon again. After dinner, I could claim four chef salads in just two days. It's so yummy! I had missed good salad with ranch dressing, but thanks to Carola and the bottles she brought back from the US, that's no longer a problem. I just have to ignore the bite of peppers inside because she mistakenly bought the triple pepper Ranch instead of the original.

Jen got another Chilean culture shock from Buvi. The sweetheart brought up how sickly and skinny I used to be, but assured me that I'm much prettier and fatter now. Next, she turned to Jen and commented that she seems to have lost at least 2 kg since Buvi saw her last, which was only a few days ago, and that she was looking sickly too. Oh bother! I'll have to advise Jen to just smile and nod.

After weeks and weeks and weeks of vacations throughout Chile, it was strange to be home again for such an extended period of time. The strangest thing is that home is a lot less relaxing than traveling. Staying home is a foreign concept. Every day Carola expects us to invite over a few friends to entertain us, and if we don't, she picks up the phone and starts to call. Unfortunately, most of my friends are out of town like good little Chileans should be so we end up amusing ourselves anyways. It's as if she thinks we'll die of boredom if we stay home, so today we took a walk.

Jen has a good sweet tooth so we visited the artisan panaderia, SantAngelo. Low and behold, this bakery also sold artisan ice cream and we couldn't resist. The platano manjar was yummy, especially covered in walnuts and lucuma chips and housed in giant waffle cones, but we struggled against the drips in the 90 degree heat. We also went window shopping in all the tiendas that line the streets. In Chile, it's perfectly acceptable to pass through the aisles with your cone in hand and we couldn't resist. It was amazing how light the ice cream felt after we had finished, more watery than cream based I guess.

I never knew that Catholics could choose to go to service on Saturday evening instead of Sunday morning, but we have such a busy schedule tomorrow that we went tonight. Jen's first mass was at la Carmen and she told me that the Catholic service is very similar to her Anglican ones.

Sunday, February 8th

It was a lazy Sunday, relatively speaking. After spending many long minutes trying unsuccessfully to jumpstart the car, we could use the rest and relaxation. Teco had us pulling the vehicle on a rope down the street while pushing at the same time. I guess that usually works with manual cars, but we had no luck. Eventually we all climbed into his pickup and left to spend the afternoon in the campo. Carola taught us to make pi de limon, and we had races in the pool with all the cousins. I did pretty well, small and tough, but for some reason, I always veer to the right. We also read in the sunshine to avoid the bugs, but they ate us alive anyway. I itch all over! Jen finished all her books and she started borrowing my library. I finished the Silver Chair and started The Horse and His Boy, Katie's favorite and number five in the Narnia series.

Dad sent me an email to tell me that I look nice in my new bikini. He may approve, but I still don't like it. Now that I'm used to it, I can objectively say that I will be wearing something with a little more cover when I get home. I don't mind showing my tummy. I've gotten used to midriff tops with all the Christmas and birthday shirts I've received here, but my rear end is not used to so much sunshine.

In the afternoon, Teco took us to see his vineyard, apple orchard, and kiwi trellises. Jen shared her wine savvy and I gawked at the apples. The red fruit covers the trees to the point that you'd think the limbs would bend to the ground. He has Fuji, Gala, and Red Chief varieties and thanks to the distinct seasons, we should have fresh apples in the house until the end of April. After picking a snack from the tree, we walked on and I discovered that...
kiwi leaves are huge, well proportioned for hats or for native loincloths. Teco offered to model for us, but we assured him that was unnecessary. As we prepared for bed, snuggling on the couch to watch “Oliver and Company,” Teco joined us just like a real dad.

Jen talked in her sleep. And it was in Spanish!

Monday, February 9th

So tired! I woke up exhausted, so exhausted that after a quick e-mail check, I mailed Mom that I wouldn't be on AOL and went back to bed. My sleeping attempt lasted twenty minutes before I gave up and made myself pancakes, but it was worth a try. Everyone joined in the breakfast fun and seemed to like my panqueques.

I keep getting up early to use the internet, otherwise Matias makes a hard task to barter myself some time later in the day. He's very obsessed with the interactive computer game Tibia. You play with other players on line and can actually chat with them as you help each other or try to kill each other. The conversations all take place in English so last night I had to help him break up with a girl from Brazil. At least that's what it seemed like I was doing.

The morning passed quickly as we registered Jen with the police and with the city. I was along as her translator and the police lady remembered me from my registration experience. Jen's goal is to be translator material by the time the next batch of exchange students comes to Curicó.

Fran invited us over for the afternoon and we swam, tanned, shared tea, toured her fruit orchards, and talked a lot. It was great, spending time with a Chilean friend again. We finished up watching “Mad About Mambo,” which set my feet a tapping. I hope Miami University has dance classes and that I can find a good swing or Latin dance partner. I'm not sure, but I think Mike is too big for the Samba.

Tuesday, February 10th

Mike has started to wake up at 7am on the off chance that I might sign on and check. He and the guys may take a road trip to Florida when classes end which is around the same time that I'll be returning to Ohio. He said he may steal the car and come to see me if I have a long layover in Miami. His friends groaned at the suggestion.

Nicole and Emily came over and we decided to go out for Chinese and then have a sleep out under the stars. We walked around the center for over an hour wasting time until the restaurant opened at 8pm. It was fabulous food. I had Chilean spring rolls, which look a lot like American egg rolls, rice, and a veggie stir-fry with oyster sauce. The waiter had a few good chuckles as I had to explain everything to Jen, but he was nice and took a group picture for us on the footbridge. The whole place was decorated like a miniature China.

Not only did I splurge on good food, but I also bought stationary to send the grandparents pretty letters and license plates for Mike and Laura that say, “You make my life happier, thank you,” in Spanish. For myself, I found an adorable raspberry red blouse with bell sleeves. Emily tried to rain on my parade by asking, “Do you really need that?” To which I replied, “No, but I really like it.” Jen supported me. It really is cute and elegant at the same time. Unfortunately, it’s hand wash only.

After dinner, we took our sleeping bags out to the trampoline in Nicole’s back yard and cuddled down. The girls were giggle...
machines, but we didn't last long and fell asleep without watching many stars.

Wednesday, February 11th

Today is Jen's one-month anniversary.

Matias received his visa confirmation so he'll be leaving the 20th of February. The nerves are starting to show, but Teresa, the nana, promised to make all his favorite foods for his last week in Chile.

Jen and I went back to Nicole’s for lunch and Jen's favorite, porotos granados. I don’t know what she sees in the bean soup, but whatever floats her boat. We swam like good Chilean girls, listened to Chilean Disney music at Jen’s request, and started “Cenicienta” (Cinderella). I loved it and understood every word, although the birds don't chirp in Spanish. We were all tired. I finished chapter two of Katie’s sequel, while Jen read on in Daughter of the Forest. She realized today that she has already read the same story in another form, but she’s still enjoying the novel.

Jen also started reading my diary. She was asking me about my first month in Chile, and I thought it'd be better to share my thoughts from when they were fresh. She was warned that it was the truth, the good, the bad, and the ugly, and has been laughing all afternoon. I guess that's a good sign. She doesn't want to share her own diary, which I understand because I’m in it. I just hope I haven't written anything embarrassing about her. There's really nothing to complain about, even if I wanted to. We fit, both for good hugs, sisterly snuggling, cramped room sharing, sweet tooth satisfying, and as far as personality goes, we lucked out. I still hold out for the separated twins story. We can bond without effort, sharing pictures, stories, laughter, and our life in Chile. I'm so glad she's here even if she's not improving my Spanish. There are more important things. Besides, I really love to help out and translate.

Thursday, February 12th

I found out that Grandpa has taken a turn for the worse. Mom was asking me if I wanted to come home for the funeral, and when I said yes, she suggested I bring home all my heavy presents with me. That was the last thing on my mind, and I used my pool time for a good think. It would be strange, going back early. I can't ever think of what I'd want to do, or more importantly, eat.

My first attempt at empanadas de pino (Chilean meat pies) was not a disaster, but I wouldn't claim a success either. Carola asked Tere to teach Jen and I, and we started out well making the filling and the dough based on a recipe book. However, Teresa (the nana) was quick to improvise and skip ingredients (such as mixing the onions with sugar) and then ask me what to do next. I was flabbergasted, but she continued to ask, "Should I start the oven? Is it missing something? Are they ready now?" Eventually, I lost my temper and had to tell her, "Tere, I don't know. You're the one teaching me!" Luckily, one of Caro's old friends dropped in and helped us finish. She was a pro and I hope she invites me over to make empanadas again some day because our results were rather tasteless despite the entire pot full of shredded onions that we used. Jen was astounded that she actually had to add salt to something in Chile, the rebound exchange students in New Zealand had told her lots of salty horror stories. I guess it depends on the family or the region of Chile that they visited. I almost always need to add more salt here.
Empanadas de Pino
Meat pasties

Pino:
- 2-3 T oil
- 5 lg. onions
- 1lb ground beef
- oregano
- sugar
- chili pepper
- 1c olives
- 1c raisins
- 8 hard boiled eggs (diced)

Pastry:
- 2c flour
- 1t salt
- 1c butter or Crisco
- 4-6T water

-Fry onions and ground beef in skillet with oil, season with spices, and remove from heat. Mix in olives and raisins. Set aside.

-Mix flour and salt for pastry. Cut in butter or Crisco until crumbly. Add enough water to make soft dough and then divide dough into 8 small balls and roll into 6” circles

-Spoon pino mix into center of each circle and top with bits of egg. Fold edges of pastry together to form a half crescent and pinch seams.

-Bake at 400 for 20min (or until lightly browned)

I don't understand what happened to Carola all of a sudden. For the first five months, she's happily bought me Batifrut yogurt and suddenly, she refuses to do it. I've asked her twice and she said she doesn't didn't want to buy the cups because the boys eat them too fast, but why buy the bottles if you don't want them to eat it? Besides, Batifrut isn't more expensive and I love it while other Chilean yogurt leaves a funny aftertaste. It wouldn't be so bad if she stuck to her story, but she came home with cup yogurt for the boys and special diet stuff for her. Why doesn't she want to make me happy? She's also left me out of the shopping trip for the sixth time after agreeing to take me to spend time together.

Teco took Jen and I to the polo fields as the sun began to set. Maxi and Estevan, a cousin, wanted to ride and Jen got to play with a mallet. She loves the horses, especially Tomate, but needs a little more practice in horsemanship. She's very good at letting the horse lead, or maybe I should say “she doesn't mind” where he takes her.

Friday, February 13th
Carola dropped Jen and I off at Teco's office where we printed my return flight information. Teco still refuses to fix the home printer because the boys waste all the ink on cartoons. At first, the computer kept shooting out crazy symbols and letters until it ran out of paper so I went in search of help. The lady next door tried reconfiguring, but we had to go across the hall to find a better expert. I think computers have something against me.

We bought Jen shoes in the center just as my cell phone died. What to do? We couldn't call Carola and she was waiting to pick us up at an undetermined location. Using my special exchange student personality, or my newfound courage, I walked into a restaurant and asked to use the phone. I never would have dared do that in Ohio, but it wasn't a problem. I wonder if that would work in the US. Then Teco sent Carola to get us.

The international South American polo championships are being held in Rancagua this weekend. The winner goes to France for the world match so we all went to watch and support Chile. The sponsor, Super Beef, was giving away free hamburgers, and that's where my trouble started.

Shortly after enjoying my free snack, my stomach started to hurt to the point that I could hardly move. Moving seem to cause more trouble, so I ended up on my back for the rest of the game. The
family went out for Soler sandwiches, but I was sent home with no supper in order to drink some herbal tea. It would have been a good occasion to pout on top of feeling miserable, but my family called which almost made it all better.

Saturday, February 14th

Happy Valentine's Day!

It's not a big holiday in Chile, but Mike and Dad both sent me Valentines e-mails, which I have yet to read. Grandma's last card mentioned my tall valentine from Ohio as well. I thought that was rather random. Mike and I aren't even dating at the moment.

Jen made me a ham and cheese omelet for breakfast. Then Carola gave us a ten minute warning before Fran pulled up in the car to take us riding. Poor Jen had been up for less than five minutes and still had her PJs on. Riding was fun, although I think my butt is bruised again and my lazy horse was exasperating. However, when she saw me grab a stick, her behavior improve remarkably. Meanwhile, Jen kept me laughing. She still "doesn't mind" and let the horse make all the decisions for her.

I still wasn't feeling really well, although the pain has passed, so I relaxed a bit. After lunch, Teresa brought me a really good mint tea. She and Carola had argued forever about which tea would be best. I almost fell asleep, but Jen and I went to visit Jacquelyn instead. I chatted with her parents for over half an hour and they invited us to the pool. Emily's dad, Rodrigo, was there with the family and we talked a while as well. He even arranged for Jen and me to come swim in the morning even though the director had told me no.

We attended another Saturday night mass and made a quick stop for bread. Carola went to Unimarc, especially to buy whole grain bread, *lo que me gusta a mí*, but they were out. Oh well, I enjoy the regular stuff anyway.

Jen's family called while we were out and she was half frantic at the missed opportunity. Searching all her numbers, she eventually got a hold of them and had a nice chat, although short by Shelly standards. She was glowing and couldn't wait to tell me all the news. I just had to pause my Chilean update, long-overdue according to my mother, and listen up.

Sunday, February 15th

Happy sixth month anniversary!

A lot of time has passed, but I still have a lot to learn. Lucky for me, school starts again in two weeks. My classmates will be touring Europe for the first four weeks, but I have decided to talk to the director and arrange to take classes in the mean time. Technically, I wouldn't have to go to school until April, but I'm devoted to learning (according to average teenager standards) and can feel the withdrawal symptoms setting in. I plan to take as many French courses as possible. I spoke with the special French professor and the conversation was a strain to my mental muscles. It seems that in mastering my Spanish, I lost the French. The smaller words just refuse to come to mind. On a happier note, I'm getting many compliments on my Spanish fluency and can watch movies without subtitles and still understand everything. I plan to fill in the rest of my time with random Spanish classes in other grade levels. The history and philosophy classes shouldn't be any trouble now.

I'm starting to feel better. After two days of not wanting to eat anything (even the thought of food turned my stomach), I woke up at six this morning hungry, thirsty, and itching all over. Luckily, the kitchen hadn't moved and I made myself a yogurt and granola snack, had a glass of water, and took two teaspoons of Benedryl so that I could sleep. I'm not sure that it's alright to take medicine like that, but it worked wonders.

I slept in until 10am and woke feeling refreshed and chipper like normal. I even made biscuits for myself and Jen while I waitied for the computer to work. Technology really doesn't like me and it took over half an hour to copy the Chilean Update onto a disk to transfer to the other computer, and that was after trying for over half an hour last night without success. Jen loved the "scones" and even asked for second helpings so I showed her how to make them I also told her that she could help herself to pancake and biscuit
mix any time she wanted. Unfortunately, that's when my tummy informed me that I wasn't completely healthy yet. Rats! I'm so used to feeling tiptop all the time that this sick business is killing me.

Jen and I discovered that even though we both speak English, the vocab is sometimes humorously different.

**English Vocabulary:**

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<th>The good old US of A</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>swimsuit</td>
<td>togs</td>
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<tr>
<td>flip flops</td>
<td>jandles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bangs</td>
<td>fringe</td>
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<tr>
<td>flashlight</td>
<td>torch</td>
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<tr>
<td>pop</td>
<td>fizzy drink</td>
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<td>receipt</td>
<td>docket</td>
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<td>washcloth</td>
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<td>sweater</td>
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(finally we understand each other!)

I'm happy to write that Carola and I had a very good day yesterday. I hope the bad vibes I was receiving were just more molehills that I was making into mountains. Jen and I helped her make pins for Matias and got all our Internet needs out of the way while the boys were at polo. Maxi is picking up an interest and went with the boys to practice before the game.

The polo finals took place in Rancagua, and Chile won 13-7 over Argentina. Teco bought us ice cream to celebrate, and while we waited for the medals to be presented, I met the photographer/producer for the Chilean magazine, "Cosas." He took our photo and asked us to call him the next time we're in Santiago. It seems he also does television interviews and is interested in the gringa's opinion of polo. His card is in my bag, but I don't think I'll use it.

Jen let her playful spirit run rampant tonight. While I washed dishes, she came up behind me and pigtailed my windblown hair. Then she did a Pebbles Flintstone spunky ponytail off the top of my head when I had toothbrush in hand. We got a photo of that one, and Teco just gave us a look that said, "Crazy gringas!"

Monday, February 16th

I'm finally learning. I woke up around 5am, tossed and turned until 6am, finished off the bottled yogurt, planned to go jogging, napped some more, and then decided that I still felt crummy and that jogging probably wasn't my best option. I took a good long bath instead.

It was a day of waiting. Tata was going to pick Jen and I up at 11am to go to the fondo, a country house near Santiago where the family was meeting to spend a week together, but our vacation started out typically Chilean. We were postponed until noon, then after lunch, then 3pm, and then 3:30. Finally, he arrived at 4:50 and we hit the road. In the meantime, I actually finished another page of my book. It has been a while since I've had time to do any serious writing. I also read some of Jen's *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, drank two cups of mint tea, watched Gilmore Girls, and gave Jen a walking pop quiz. She had to find both Jacquelyn's and Ernesto's house on her own and passed my test with flying colors. Mom wants to thank her because she says that I sound so much happier now. I must admit that it was great fun singing together as we walked.
On the drive up, I was Oohing and Ahhing at the greenness of the countryside until we made one right turn and everything shriveled into desert. Cactus and half harvested wheat fields lined the road as far as the eye could see with a few little adobe huts to add character. I learned for the first time that charcoal does not come out of the ground like regular coal. The Chileans burn the native thorny espina trees inside the huts to make fuel for their famous asados.

The house was gorgeous. I read in a book once how snobby people go around counting the windows and silverware so I thought I'd give it a try too. The results: 5 bedrooms, 22 beds, 6 bathrooms with incredible tubs for a relaxing read, and no less than 63 windows (that's not counting all the separate sections inside a major frame). It was pretty much a patch of paradise with property lines well marked by the sprinkling systems. We had beautiful green grass, lots of roses, a refreshing if not downright cold swimming pool, ping pong, satellite TV, and the opportunity to go out trekking on up to five of the thirty horses. Jen and I doubled up for a lot of fun, but my only pair of jeans was plastered with horse sweat and hair. I had been told to bring as little as possible and had to hurry a load of laundry before the chilly night descended.

Mikes two-year anniversary/commemoration e-mail arrived this morning. It was nice to celebrate such a good friendship.

Tuesday, February 17th

Tía Pilar can't sleep with any light in the room and the windows lack curtains so she was up copying recipes when I got up at 8am. It seems the local nana has already made an impression with her cooking skills and tasty dishes.

I jogged through the desert and ran through my Tae Kwon Do forms before a not so nutritious breakfast. It was Tinti's birthday, and we woke him with a manjar and thirty-two candles. The nanas also made fresh pan amasado that went great with butter and jam.

The pool is nice with water so cold that the polite adjective is refreshing. We sunned, read, and tossed the tennis ball around waiting for lunch which wasn't ready until 4:30. The backs of my legs are officially burnt, although nothing compared to Jen's face and shoulders.

Tio Pablo tried to teach the gringas to golf, but we were pretty sad. Jen had a bit of experience and suggested that I use an iron. I asked which one that was and she said the metal one. "But they're all metal?" "No, the rounded ones are called woods." Does that make any sense at all? It was a good thing that only the putting parts had grass or I would have been in big trouble.

I realized today that Jen and I might be building a lifelong friendship, the kind where I'd have to fly New Zealand to see her get married. I plan to stay at her dad's bed and breakfast for a kiwi breakfast and take the south island tour to her grandmas. Unfortunately, when and where and how she'll get married is still a mystery, and besides, her husband might get a little put out if we planned a road trip during their honeymoon. Kiwi is an adjective that describes anything having to do with New Zealand.

Wednesday, February 18th

For a change of pace, Tía Pilar piled the kids into the truck for a ride to the San Antonio. We managed to fit twelve people, including four adults, in one double seated pickup. It was a bit cramped, but no one cared. We walked along the wharf of the port, meandered through the
artisan market and ended up on a boat tour of the bay. Pelicans flocked in the waves and a friendly sea lion did tricks on command, diving off an old wreck.

We also stopped at Palmaire, a small tourist town that specializes in greda. This dark pottery is typical for Chilean cooking. They like to make pastel de choclo and porotos granados in individual serving sizes, and the greda keeps your food warm on the table. They also had the biggest empanadas I have ever seen. Each one was over a pound, and the vendors were still advertising them for once. You would need a buddy to finish one for lunch let alone a snack.

Thursday, February 19th

Today is my lucky day. Although I didn't find a four leaf clover when Jen and I looked, I did find my earring. Christine's present from Germany had decided to journey to the bottom of the pool, but the sunshine helped reveal the sparkle.

Jen said it looked like I was fighting off the goons of the night as I practiced Tae Kwon Do in my bare feet. I braved the bees for better footing. Later, we played a lot of cards even though the wind was gusty and bothersome and then we both took time to read and relax. I finished The Horse and His Boy, wrote letters home on pretty paper, played ping-pong, and learned how to play backgammon. Jen tried to teach me that last one, but I'm afraid that I think it's the most boring game in the world with hardly any thought involved. I won by a long shot, but just because the dice rolled in my favor.

Friday, February 20th

My pen found its way to the table where I left it, although I swear it wasn't there last night when I looked. The morning was cool and cloudy, very strange for Chile, but perfect for jogging. I couldn't resist. Jen and I didn't even think twice about swimming. We were enjoying the feel of jeans and sweatshirts again, but we did go horseback riding. Jen loves trotting, but the horse was a painful little vibrator. It hurt and I gritted my teeth as I persevered.

For once, Jen “minded” and wanted to do something. I wasn't going to counter that for the world.

I finished writing chapter three and started chapter four in the same day. I told Jen that it was a writer’s morning and she wrote letters home too. She's got me beat on length and poetry.

Teco, Carola, and Matias arrived later with Maxi’s new kitten. I really hope I'm not too allergic to his new pet. Carola is still not happy, but it's better than rats (AKA hamsters) that he originally wanted. Jen wants to know what Teco would be willing to trade Helga for.

We were demoted to the couches for the night. I think Carola is uncomfortable sharing a bedroom with the exchange students. However, Pilar and crew leave tomorrow which will free up about half the sleeping space in the house.

Saturday, February 21st

I'm getting old. Sleeping on the couch is definitely not what it used to be and the feel of a soft comfy bed tonight is worth a word of anticipation.

Teco made me cry this morning. He came out on the patio where I was writing and I said “Buenos dias” just like normal. Then he starts yelling at me out of the blue. It was the first time that he has ever yelled at me and he had no right. I couldn't even defend myself because he wouldn't listen and you can't fight your host father. It's times like these when you really remember that you're a guest, not a daughter. Jen felt bad because I was the main target and she didn't understand anything. Teco insisted that we couldn't leave all our things for the nanas to pick up since we didn't bring our own nana along to help. However, he failed to realize that I always pick up after myself, always make my own bed, and always look after his children. The boys' room is a disaster area, especially the bathroom, but they didn't get a lecture. All the drama resulted from leaving my sleeping bag on the couch so I wouldn't wake Jen, and one of the nanas rolled it up while I was eating breakfast.

The day improved from there. Jen cheered me up with good hugs and by suggesting a walk to help me cool down. She even
snuck me a few napkins out of the kitchen so that I could blow my nose without announcing my distress to the world. Why is it that your nose always run when you cry?

We played Nertz and swam in the pool. Diving in with a string green bikini is dangerous because the bottoms don't quite stay put, but somehow I managed. Jen and I ended up tossing a tennis ball around for quite a while. I'm practicing my lefty skills. Once, I was watching baby Martin when Jen winged the ball my way. It hit me straight in the stomach and bounced back with a thunk. She told me that I have abs like a brick wall and we both laughed.

With the help of the nana, we made fresh pan amasado. My hands were sore after we finished the three bags full of mix, but it was addictively good bread when enjoyed with real butter. I couldn't stop munching.

There was a fox watching me practice Tae Kwon Do in the morning. I think it's the same dashing creature that comes out for scraps at night while we gather around the grill for an asado under the stars. In other animal news, Maxi had to give away his kitten. He turned out to be just as allergic as I am to the cat hair and his eyes puffed up like pastries.

Sunday, February 22nd

Gundi watched me practice Tae Kwon Do in the morning. The blinds kept opening and closing depending on what direction I was facing. Later, he switched positions and peeked around the curtain. Turns out he studied Tae Kwon Do for a while when he was younger, then the school moved to Santiago.

It's a lucky thing that I'm good with questions. Otherwise, Jen and I may have had half an hour's warning that we were leaving early to go back to Curicó. The plan is for us to go to Santiago with Buvi and Tata after lunch and then home to Curicó in the evening. I think the Correa family is getting some last-minute bonding time in before Matias leaves. They need it. Besides, seven people in one car with all their baggage is a little much. I gave Matias my last advice: lots of smiles, talk about anything and everything, and have a good time. Then with a hug and a bag of American chocolate I said goodbye to my brother and the family dynamics changed again.

Jen and I visited the mall while Buvi and Tata gave our birthday wishes to the grand Buvi. The generation gap in Chile is much smaller than I'm used to. I can't believe that I have a Chilean great grandmother. They bought us lucuma frozen yogurt, Buvi's favorite, and although I prefer other flavors in my yogurt, with a chocolate covered waffle cone, it wasn't bad. Jen and I browsed a bit, buying stationery, note pads with cute pictures and Spanish lettering, a new diary, and a Christmas CD that I thought Mom would like. We passed through the cinema to see what was playing and ended up in the open-air food court. We sat by the fountain, listening to music and playing cards as one hour turned to three. When Buvi and Tata arrived, we decided on pizza for dinner at Basta Pasta, and even though we had already had dessert, they talked us into trying the cake. The plaque on the door said, “Some things in life are never forgotten, our cakes are one of them.” They certainly had a large enough selection. I chose cheesecake, then changed my mind for a chocolate nutty mousse, and finally decided on an almond vanilla cream cake. It was yummy, but when you think of the biggest piece of cake you've ever been served and then multiply that by four, you'll have an idea of my serving size. It seemed like they brought a whole cake to the table, and I could only eat a third of it. Hurray for the inventor of take home boxes.

We got back home after midnight, but I still got online to send Mom a birthday e-card. I have been frantic all week, since Teco told me that we wouldn't get home until Tuesday. I knew that I couldn't miss my mom's birthday. I pestered him all week to go find the Internet at a friend's house or at a cyber cafe, but I made it. Her Atari-like space e-card should arrive on time, make her laugh, and relieve a little of her cabin fever.
Monday, February 23rd

Happy Birthday Mom!

I tossed and turned all night thinking about chatting with her in the morning. By 8am, I was already hopping the fence at Buvi’s. I figured she'd want to call me, missing my voice, but I didn't know she'd missed me so much. Out of the blue, she decided that she wanted to visit Chile and me, but mostly me, next week. It's crazy timing because my host family isn’t here to ask and Cony just called this morning to invite me to her campo. Cony was an exchange student to Ohio last year and wanted to show the little city mouse of a gringa the country version of Chile for my last week of vacation.

I’d love to explore Santiago and share Curicó with my mother. However, by afternoon, her doubts had returned as I knew they would. She's going to have a serious talk with Dad before making a decision tomorrow, but I can guess what her answer will be. Why is international travel so intimidating?

Jen moved into her own room and made Spanish help cards for verbs and vocab. My room seems strangely empty now. I've shared with Jen every night for over a month. We made baked potatoes for dinner, but I guess there is a non-baking variety. After an hour, we put our crunchy spuds in the microwave. Luckily, the banana bread seems to be holding its own. Buvi’s frig had guarded five perfectly browned bananas for over a week.

Mike and I chatted for over an hour. It was weird using the computer at night. A lack of brothers makes a big difference and I finally finished replying to all my e-mails so that I can leave again to face another delightful mountain of messages on my return. I also got my new “Taste of Home” magazine to save for a dull and dreary day.

Tuesday, February 24th

Mom's not coming. Her brave excitement lasted only a day. Sigh.

Jen and I made stir-fry for dinner and the rice was delicious. While she watched Friends, I took advantage of the time to write. It was the first time in days that I had worked on my novel.

The Correas came home in high spirits, and I had a good chat with Carola. Teco is the only one that seems moody, but after all, he lost his polo buddy. The boys just made a beeline for the Internet to play Tibia. I swear they have an uncontrollable addiction. Jen was “muerta de risas” reading Dragon Singer. The laughter kept erupting from her room without warning.

Wednesday, February 25th

It was another early morning because I wanted to chat before I left for Talca. The last few days Dad has gotten on before work too. I think they’re really missing me at the moment.

I woke Carola up at 10am, or better put, prompted her out of bed when she realized I still had to buy my ticket. She's in such a good mood now and we talked the whole trip. She even searched for coins so that I'd have correct change and returned, spur of the moment, after I boarded the bus, bearing gifts of chocolate bars with almond cream. The mix of almonds and chocolate is my favorite Chilean combination.

Cony picked me up in Talca with her brother Felipe and we toured the city. We walked for hours through the center, to the plaza, through their schools, and went shopping for a friend’s boyfriend's birthday present. Talca has some nice clothes, but we weren't shopping through the tiendas, just passing through.

While Cony waxed in preparation for going to the beach, Felipe bought me McDonald's ice cream and discovered McSwing. He loves the manjar. For a while, I couldn't figure out why he kept switching sides as we walked, but eventually I realized that he's a gentleman. He always walked between me and the street, let me go first as he held the door, and shared ice cream like old friends with the same spoon.

Note: In Chile, no one shaves their legs. They all wax. I’m just glad that I brought razors with me from home because I’ve gone with Scarlett and Kristin when they’ve had it done and it sounds painful. The worst part is that the hair seems to grow back just as fast.
Curtiduria is really rustic country. It was mostly desert, but the ancient two car train that we rode from Talca followed the Maule river as it ran to the sea. We made the trip with a little old man and what seemed like a million boxes of grapes. The poor guy was sweating buckets as he tried to organize all the massive packages and little spiders ran rampant. Cony’s house was surrounded by fresh oranges, strawberries, figs, peaches and grapes. A hammock tempts me in the garden and the river runs close by the yard. Her mom was brewing homemade orange marmalade, and her dad was squeezing fresh chicha (very very sweet almost wine) in the family bodega. They were all so nice that I felt right at home and they reminded of my own lovable and very missable family.

I got to know Cony’s parents better at lunch over spicy empanadas. The hot chili spice in their recipe had me sweating and my nose running in no time. The jokes never stopped. Her mom is a teacher in the country school who loves playing cards, making jam and tomato sauce, and cooking in general. Her dad raises alpacas for wool production and has his own vineyards.

Thursday, February 26th

Cony’s room is as dark as can be and I was able to sleep in. Country life did take a little adjustment. You wouldn't believe how hard it is to remember that you can't flush the toilet paper when you're sitting in a normal looking bathroom. It's just not natural to throw it in the trash can. They don’t have good water pressure in the house so we had to drive to the local school and use the bathroom there for our showers. We had that privilege because Cony’s mom is the director.

Her dad was busy harvesting pink grapes. Supposedly, he is the only grower of uvas rosadas in Chile, if not the world. I sampled some for breakfast, and they're very very sweet. Later, Cony's mom made more orange marmalade and we stopped by the side of the road to see the rustic version of pan amasado. This local woman was actually baking the bread in a burn-barrel.

Later, we walked to the riverbank in search of a phone signal. Armed with three cellular phones, Cony and her mom walked back and forth, then in circles, to call Talca. I enjoyed the view. Horses waded in the rocky shallows and perky fish jumped the rippling waves. The road and train track pretty much followed the river and everything is natural and undeveloped. I saw goats, donkeys, chickens, sheep, and turkeys as I jogged along the road early in the morning.

Cony's mom loves cards and usually wins. She writes little notes in her scorebook and you can see the love she carries with her, especially for Cony. They reminded me of my own mom as I watched them together.
Friday, February 27th

Today started with an early wake-up call, especially since Cony told me to be up at 7:30 when she meant 6:30. We boarded the little train once again to get to Constitución where her dad was selling his uvas rosadas. We walked from the station to the beach with the asceroso olor of the paper mill trying to suffocate us. At one point, we started to feel rain droplets falling from above in a cloudless sky, but Cony soon burst into laughter to realize that it was some kind of paint spray and my face was covered in white spots.

The Piedra Iglesia was slightly offshore of La Playa de los Gringos, and of course we had to take pictures of both the sign for gringo’s beach and the huge rock church. When the tide goes out, you can actually walk through the church window into the rock tunnel, but Connie said we were lucky to arrive at high tide. The smell inside the rock is even worse than that of the paper mill!

Cony had made very sure that we were well prepared for the cold beach with sweaters, long pants, socks, and shoes, but the sun beat down and we shed layers in the heat. Naturally, I hadn't brought my swimsuit since it was supposed to be cold, but we rolled up our jeans and splashed in the water until we were soaked anyway.

We had lunch with her aunt, affectionately called la monjita (the little nun) because she's such a devout Catholic, and she decided that we had to go on a riverboat ride, right now. Then she decided that she had to go in the middle boat which happened to be the only one without a captain, but it was the prettiest.

Cony's dad took us home in the truck by way of the San Francisco Ice Cream Factory and the hospital. Her grandfather is sick. Unfortunately, nature called while we were visiting and I had to answer. The hospital bathroom was atrocious, swarming with ants and filthy in general. When I went to leave, I found myself trapped and had to pound on the door until someone came to my rescue. It seems that one of the patients is a little loca and likes stealing the doorknobs.

Saturday, February 28th

Saturday is cleaning day at Cony’s house. I got to sweep the leaves from the driveway and harvest oranges for marmalade and for snacking. The fruit is incredibly sweet. Then I rode a real live huaso horse to see their tomato fed pigs, played lots more cards, and best of all, met my first alpaca. They are cute and fuzzy like teddy bears, but have intelligent eyes. We had to bring green grasses up the hill because the high country is so dry. All the roads and creek beds are nothing more than trails of dust above the rocks. True campinos really are a different breed of Chileans. They have a distinct accent, use different vocab, and love bread. Two out of three meals here consists of bread with your choice of butter, jam, milk, coffee, or tea. Sometimes you could have ham, cheese, or palta too. Lunch on the other hand, was huge. I was served a salad course before the main dish and then offered a second meal. Luckily, only the guys were use to two platefuls of hearty comida and I finished with dessert.

The family’s humor came through again when they sent me out to buy the weekly vegetables from the farmer in English. They loved the look on the vendors face when I asked, “You don't happen to have a few pounds of carrots, green beans, and cucumbers, do you?”

In the evening, we went to the Pencuhue melon festival. It was a small-town music concert, but lots of fun with mariachis, comedians, and contests. We got home after 3am.
Sunday, February 29th

Happy leap year!

I signed Cony’s family guestbook before heading home. The drive from Curtiduria to Talca lasts an hour with 20 mph winding curves and sharp drops to the bottom. However, it's beautiful to watch the cattle and horses wading in the river below. The Maule is actually three rivers that join together before running into the ocean.

I arrived in Curicó just in time for mass. Jen spoke a few sentences in Spanish, and I teased that maybe it would have been better for her if I had stayed away, but Carola said she missed me. It was the first Sunday during Lent and all the Catholics received ashes on their foreheads, but unlike the American Catholics, they don't have to give up meat on Fridays except for Good Friday.

Lunch in the campo was followed by an Arabian horse exhibition. The riders flipped off and on their mounts at full speed and crawled under and through their well-trained legs. Two of the horses even sat on their rumps for pictures and they all bowed to the audience. The trainer was decked out in black and silver robes, wielding a silver lance.

We also toured the newly developed fungus farm that Teco’s brother has set up. He plans to sell lots of exotic mushroom varieties to the fancy restaurants in Santiago.

Monday, March 1st

Today was my second, first day of school in Chile! I know that I'm weird and that my excitement helps prove it, but I had a great time. Despite the warning that we would do nothing, I came home with homework for every single class. This year I plan to do all the homework and quizzes like a regular Chilean student if at all possible. I even raised my hands to ask and answer questions in class. No more meek and quiet little Shelly.

My companions from last year are currently touring France as a class trip so I had to enter with the juniors again. It actually worked out well because I got to know a lot of them last year when we traveled to the island of Chiloe. I walked into class and many of the girls shouted my name and ran over to exchange hugs. Even the guys will spot me in the street and take the time to joke around and say Hi. For whatever reason, I'm actually starting to get a lot more silly boy attention in the form of cat calls and "I love you" declarations. In Chile, the guys are much more verbally flirtations, especially when you’re out walking the street. The other day, I even heard a car horn that had been made to sound like a cat call. Craziness. In school, the boys like to show off what little English they know and if I make corrections, they come back the next day to prove that they can get it right. Last year I just blended in as a native Chilean amongst all my noticeably gringa friends, but I guess my insuppressible charm couldn't be contained any longer. Now I have admirers too.

Vicky is the new AFS student from Austria. She doesn't speak Spanish and has to rely on English, another second language, to communicate.

It rained buckets in the afternoon. Jen and I just made it to the post office before the downpour started. She wanted to jump in the puddles, but we were still in uniform. Unfortunately, she also needed doodle pads, folders, and a pencil case so we braved the drops and scurried to Feng (a Chinese hodgepodge of a store). Then Carola came and picked us up. Luckily, she’s in a great mood again, which probably relates to a good night’s sleep. She told me that she hadn't slept well the whole last month waiting for Matias to leave and offered to get us more peanut butter without even being asked.

Later, Agusta and I splashed through the showers, following the rainbow towards her old school, and returned slightly splotchy and soaked half an hour later. Sigh. Why does she have to return to New York just when I discover what a great jogging partner she is. Then it was study, eat, bath, and bed. Not necessarily in that order.

Tuesday, March 2nd

It was another great day at school. The teacher said my Spanish homework was well written although I got the question wrong that I had resorted to Carola for help. History was great because the
professor talked liked a normal Chilean. After last year's constant struggle to understand anything he said, I consider that a huge improvement. Psychology was fun and something new that I've never had before. We should be getting self diagnostics soon.

French is interesting because both 3ºA and 3ºB cover the same material, and I'm in both classes. I talked with one professor and she's going to let me do independent stuff when they do the normal worksheets and I'll just have double servings of oral presentations.

I was so relieved to realize that my French summered well and has come right back into play. The new French teacher gave me compliments on my speaking skills, even if I do have a *gringa* accent.

The kids are also warming up quicker than I expected. Today we chatted like good friends and I only shocked them a little when they discovered that I am nineteen. How ancient! So now I'm old and fat, at least that’s the impression I got when one of my friends greeted me with “*Te encuentro gorda*, Shelly.” You never can please these Chileans.

Poor Jen is bored stiff. She doesn't understand anything, although as a trooper she keeps insisting that she does, but I know better when she thinks she's answering questions. What's worse is that she comes home and has nothing to do. It'll be nice when basketball practices start, but for the time being, my shadow is as close as ever. She even switched seats to be next to me under the condition that she wouldn't chat and I only had to shush her twice.

It doesn't help that I'm quite busy with homework, trying to do everything like a real Chilean student, but I put my things aside to play basketball with "my sister" and smiled as she needed to vent her talkative spirit on someone. Our only problem is that she's consuming all my peanut butter at lightning speed. Of course, I didn't say anything because it's silly and she's still getting comfy in her new home, but it's my peanut butter. Theatrical tear.

Wednesday, March 3rd

Another great day at school. I was singing in the street and bursting with good cheer. Jen loved biology and we already have lentil seeds growing in shoe boxes toward a tiny speck of light (or at least we hope that's what they're doing) as an experiment of *phototropismo*. PSU Castellano produced another AP like worksheet and I got 11 out of 12 right. Hurray! But by far, math was my favorite class. I whizzed through the problems, amazing the class, and relishing the creative thinking. Most of the harder questions have tricky shortcuts and I had to think outside the box. I was in my element, and Jen was Grrr-ing at the sporadic Chilean approach to math problems.

Jen took the last novel in my library to read by the pool while I did laps. She says the *Cape Refuge* is fantastic, but she can't figure out who done it. We ate our spaghetti on her bed watching a British murder mystery. You can definitely tell the difference in British and American cinema and I couldn't help but laugh. Then I laughed even harder when they listed all the hat makers in the credits. I still can't figure out why the *nanas* make the pasta ahead of time, only to cool in off in the refrigerator so that we can reheat it for dinner later in the week.

Carola is starting to feel more like a mom. She gives good “holding on” hugs, chats about my day, started planing our painting project, and bought us peanut butter. She even helped set up our shoebox and called around to find the novels that I need for class. At lunch, we sit and talk until my watch says it's time to go back to school.

Thursday, March 4th

I'm so tired and I really hope I'm not developing a habit. Monday I woke up at 5:30, Tuesday 4:30, and today 3:15. It's ridiculous! I'm exhausted and I can't sleep.

In Chilean history, I proved my stuff by memorizing all the pre-Hispanic Chilean tribes even with the tough Mapuche vocabulary. It was an oral pop quiz and the professor picked on the *gringa* first. Even though I succeeded, I had to start peeling layers when my turn ended because I was sweating so much from nerves. The
workload is mounting but I still make time to go to the pool and chat with Emily, Jacqueline, and Jessie. They were easy to spot because who else would be lying under her towel, but Jessie, or me for that matter. It's a surefire sign of a gringa.

Jen and I made banana bread in the afternoon. There was a slight dash of confusion as I told her to add an egg and sugar to what she thought was banana milk. Carola had hinted twice that she'd enjoy such a treat and we were happy to help out.

I almost finished translating my dessert recipes into Spanish. You would not believe how many people have asked me for a copy. It's strange to be studying again and budgeting my time. It's even trickier because Jen is copying all my notes after class which means I can't use my notebook while she has it and afterwards she needs to play a bit, just like a puppy. However, I did designate two English classes as study periods instead of filling in another class. I'm almost finished the Chronicles of Narnia so that I can start the two Spanish novels I have to read ASAP and I've completed most of the research for my French presentation. My school skills seemed to have summered well.

Friday, March 5th

The senior class (4º) left for France, which gave 3ºB an early morning because our teacher went with them. I wore my swimsuit under my uniform so that I could dash right to the pool before meeting the boys to walk home. The water was goosebumply cold and I was saddened, especially since they're closing the pool a week early due to low attendance and cold weather. Jen kept time and chatted with me as I did laps.

We had the biggest corn on the cob that I have ever seen for lunch. It was the huma version and by the time I finished I was well stuffed and well satisfied. Yummy!

Jen and I watched “Mulan” at Jacquelyn’s house and did half a crossword before heading to Ernesto’s for a meeting. Summary: As a group, we were reprimanded for not studying or doing our homework and for speaking English. Don't look at me. Lynz was bursting with pride as she translated for Jen, displaying her improvement. I can't believe how far she’s come in just six months.

Jen is also improving in leaps and bounds and getting along well in school, but the typical exchange student headaches are setting in as she strains to pick out words and phrases during the lectures. A lot of the classes in Chile are dictated instead of using text books which makes it double hard for the New Zealand gringa to catch on. She’s borrowing my notebook after school to copy it all down and then I explain what we did. During class, I placed her under strict no chatting instructions because I may be able to rattle off in Spanish without much effort, but I still can't follow two different conversations at once, especially in different languages. Jen's general reaction: She enjoys laughing in English because the professor has an interesting accent that can only be described as computerish. She loves the enthusiasm of our history teacher, but doesn't understand a word and she’s frustrated by the inconsistent math system. Our teacher skips around and likes tricky questions that require creativity. While I'm saying, "Wow that's clever," she just glares and laments "We would never leave an answer like that in NZ." However, she shines in Chemistry. I finally decided to take the challenge and sit the class even though I've never had a lot of the prep material. I'm seeing most of the information for the first time in their quick review, and Jen is spouting out answers without even understanding the instructions. Her only drawback is timidity. She wants me to answer for her, but she has to find her own voice. Luckily, as I arranged for extra French classes (I now have a total of five a week) she ended up by herself in several periods. She comes away so proud of herself for communicating with the other students in Spanish. Without me, she has to try harder and it does her a world of good.
Saturday, March 6th

I made my last trip to the Estadio pool and came out with goosebumps and satisfaction after a great swimming summer. Thanks to the sleepy Jen, I even got to write a page of my book. It's been over a week since I've had the time to work on it.

After lunch, Teco took us for a car ride. We started at his apple orchard where we picked our own delicious fruit off the branches. Walking through the neighboring melon and sunflower field, we traded fruit so that Berta could make miel de melon (melon honey). I finally managed to sneak a picture with Teco's lovable nana as she served us leche con platano, chilenitos, and crackers. She wouldn't even sit and visit. I wonder what it is about the difference in social classes that can allow the nana to be part of the family, but deny her the right to relax and join in a conversation. Our last stop was a photo shoot of Teco's new horses. He's now in the market, buying and selling high quality mounts. I'm going to help him set up a website.

Plans changed and instead of a pajama party we ended up at Exceso until 3am. It was Emily's last time so I went along even though the smoke and loud music were just as bad as usual. I left feeling half deaf, but had a great time. Juan Pablo, a soccer player from Santiago, was both a gentleman and a fun dancer. He was good, salsa-ing and mambo-ing like a pro. He was asking about my boyfriend, when I'd be back at the disco, and if he could call me, but I accidentally forgot to give him my number. A two-month romance isn’t worth the trouble. Naturally, I got some compliments mixed into the conversation as well. All in all, it was a nice night, but I'd still prefer to enjoy my days and sleep at night. Autopilot is a good word for my dancing skills since my brain was already turned off. Carola dropped us off and picked up because she didn't want us to take a taxi which she considers dangerous, although that’s how most exchange students get to and from the disco.

Jen was having fun testing to see if the family could say “Sponge Bob Square Pants” and Carola is making a verb cheat sheet for Matias. I had to give up and admit defeat on Don Juan Tenorio, the novel assigned for Castellano PSU. It's like asking an exchange student in the US to read Shakespeare in olde English. Sigh.

Sunday, March 7th

One of Jacqueline's friends, several in fact, got a hold of my cell number and have been “pinching” me all week. This morning, they called at 5am, and I had just gone to sleep at 4am.

Carola invited me to go with her and pick up the boys. It was a brisk autumn day, the kind that makes you want to rake leaves and munch apples, and they were hard at play with tennis lessons. Afterwards, we picked up special empanadas at a secret shop that looks crummy on the outside, but according to the long line that stretched out the door, it must have the best pastries in town.

We were going to go see a movie, but no family films were playing. As a second option, we hit the video store, but the boys only wanted to watch “The Lord of the Rings,” which was all rented out, and we ended up at home with no plans as Carola and Teco attended a funeral. I used the time to finish my French reports, write an update, and pick out special pictures to print for the scrapbook when I leave. The time is fading fast, especially now that I feel more like part of the family. I sat and chatted with Carola while she painted and I helped Gundi with homework in my PJs.

Mom called. Katie needed a break from people, including her sister, and Dad was taking Caro home. Over the weekend, they had picked her up from New Philadelphia and taken her to Washington DC for a tour of our capital. Dad said that the Correas were doing so much for me; it was the least they could do for their daughter. It sounds like they had a great trip, but they still miss me. I hung up
happy and hungry and warmed up my dinner at 10:30. Talking to home is worth the wait.

Monday, March 8th

It was the first gym class of the year, and we started right into conditioning. My classmates were amazed at how sporty I am and laughed as I lapped them. Jen swears that next week she needs to warm up for the ten minutes of jogging that is our class warm-up. Then we jogged, sprinted, and walked in intervals for the rest of the class. I was having a great time, but then again, I am strange. Jen was as pink as deep strawberry ice cream, but she felt proud when she didn’t wimp out. Then we threw our sweaty selves into the family pool to cool off.

Nicole just got back from Argentina with what I assume is jetlag silliness and no voice. She was making us laugh all afternoon. We’ll be able to enjoy her company for two more days and then she heads off to Santiago. We were all helping her pack and Jessie provided snacks, nothing that even hints of healthy was on her shopping list.

Jen and I made apple crumble while I finished my homework. We had already thrown ourselves in the pool, hot and sweaty from all that jogging. It was a spur of the moment invention. I had a bag of apple cinnamon granola that had lost its crunch, and we decided to toast it again with flour, butter, spices and lots of apples. It helps that we have vanilla ice cream in the freezer. We’re taking advantage of the autumn fruit supply before it runs out.

The boys have finally tired of their internet phenomenon, Tibia, but the computer still has them hooked. They will spend all morning, all afternoon, and all evening typing away with power worms, Zelda or Mario. Jen and I are now giving several hours notice just so that we can get a turn before bedtime. Having two little boys hovering over your shoulder asking "How much longer?" is not exactly conducive to the email answering environment. They’re still as sweet as ever though. Gundi has his backpack prepped and ready half an hour before school starts. He hops about urging us to hurry, but I put my foot down and told him that fifteen minutes was the earliest that I’d leave the house. It’s only a five minute walk to school. When the last bell rings, we gather in the entranceway to trek back home together. They love to tell us about their day, especially when it includes tennis lessons. I’m really going to miss them when I leave.

Tuesday, March 9th

I realized once again that Shelly does not react well to failure. After an in-class summary and character descriptions, I picked up Don Juan Tenorio, which I had given up as a lost cause due to the castellano antiguo, and I read the first sixty pages. I admit that I’m reading for general comprehension only, but I couldn’t give up.

I warmed up Tae Kwon Do forms and decided to run my combinations. I’d forgotten how many we do in class and with five sets per side, I was soon sweating buckets. Carola and Gundi were enjoying watching the silly gringa. As a cool down, I threw myself in the family pool. My swimsuit was already in place as a replacement for my sports bra that had disappeared in the wash.

Tere made cheese empanadas for lunch and baked three just for me. Hurray! Everyone else had the fried variety.

It was a great e-mail day with notes from Mom, Katie, Mike, and Laura, my four favorites. Dad would be one of my favorites too, but he’s better at writing to Kristin. I don’t mind too much since he still shares e-mails with Mom, and that’s one less response for me. I love them all!

Wednesday, March 10th

Mom is a bit jealous of Jen's human alarm clock that gets the job done with a chirpy "Buenos Días" instead of an annoying beep. and the boys have gotten used to a Shelly wake up call followed by breakfast requests. They only ever drink milk in the morning, but I
can still be complicated. They have their choices of good old whole milk, chocolate milk, or the manjar variety (with or without extra sugar), and then they have to decide if they should give the microwave a workout for a warm breakfast or just drink their liquid calcium cool and fresh. Most nights I also get to heat up the dinner that the nana has left in the refrigerator. The boys always take their plates into the living room on cushioned TV trays, usually to watch Sabrina the Teenage Witch, and then I get to wash the dishes. I like helping out, especially when Carola is noticeably tired.

The first volleyball practice of the year went very well. We have a large group, but about half are rookies, including Jen. She has never played outside of gym class and we had to start with all the basics of setting, serving, and spiking with her hand open. I think she got cold feet at the thought of attending a basketball practice alone with a bunch of Chileans, not to mention the two weeks of physical training required, so my shadow followed me to volleyball. We practiced hard and the time flew by. We left our 5:45-7pm practice at 8pm and didn't even notice the extra hour. My only complaint was the last twenty minutes of giggly scrimmaging. If we're not going to play well, well as in effort, I'd rather not play at all. Sigh, but at least I had strong serves. Poor Jen's arms were red.

I gave Emily's goodbye speech at Rotary and she was touched. She didn't think that she lived up to the truth of my words, but kept the notes as a memory. Later, Nicole's host dad stood up and we hid our laughter as he pointed out the downfalls of Curicó’s exchange program in front of all the Rotarians. I agree that speaking too much English is a problem, but I have yet to decide if it would be better to rotate among three host families rather than staying in the same house all year.

Thursday, March 11th

Jen and I had to have a talk. She doesn't eat much for lunch or dinner, but makes up for it by snacking in between. That's fine because it's what she's used to and comfortable with, but it's not fair that she snacks of my favorites (granola, Basic 4, and peanut butter) in eye boggling amounts when she expects me to ask for more. I told her that it was her responsibility to get replacements when she eats all of something and she was taken aback, but she has to find her own voice sometime.

The once went well even though Lindsay didn't get out of school until 11am. It was simple with pan con queso, torta, y pasteles on the patio. I was a bit disappointed by all the English. We have so little time left. I can't believe that they don't want to take advantage of every last opportunity. I ended up chatting with Kristin, Carola, and Buvi. Our Californian has fallen head over heels in love with her host brother to the point of making plans to transfer to Uruguayan college. He sounds like a shady character who cheats on a lot of girls, but love is apparently blind.

I chatted with Mike for his birthday and had a great time. The flirtation is still very evident, but I honestly miss hanging out with him. He even offered to let me paint his toenails, which I quickly thought better of. Lots of smiles tonight.

The boys have been moody all week, and I hope it's just the adjustment of going back to school. I don't think I can take much more whining, crying, and fighting during homework and mealtimes.

Friday, March 12th

Using the library during English class, I managed to do all my research on the American Indians and start my project on ancient China. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that I seem to exhibit the ideals of Taoism, a philosophy that teaches a positive outlook and self acceptance as a means to happiness. The explanation came with many examples from Winnie the Pooh. At least I'm in good company according to The Tao of Pooh.

Jen and I went to Coco's for lunch where we had a typical Chilean dish of corn, peas, green beans, pumpkin, potatoes, and beef cooked until mushy and very tasty. It was amusing listening to her mom list all the things that Chile does better than the US. She was a little prejudiced, but very nice. It seems to be a family trait because the girls give the warmest hugs and their dad loves telling
jokes. Unfortunately, they don’t translate well for Jen. Chilean humor is different, silly, and based on vocab that she doesn't catch. She started getting annoyed when people assume that she doesn't understand something and indignantly replies, “Yes, I do. Un poquito!” Sadly, she doesn't and still blindly answers “Sí” when asked any questions that she think she understands. She doesn't even ask me questions when I speak to her in the basic Spanish that I think she should know, and she just gets confused.

Saturday, March 13th

Lots of homework can be accomplished on a Saturday morning by a gringa who doesn't sleep in. I spent several hours researching history, measuring lentil sprouts, and finishing Don Juan Tenorio. Try as I might, I still can't pronounce the “jota” properly. Carola even helped me practice.

It was a tough but rewarding volleyball practice. We started at 11am and I got to play with the best girls and guys in the final scrimmage which lasted until 1:30. That meant 2 1/2 hours of tough belly sliding, bench hopping, finger aching, and sweat producing work, and I had a blast. I walked Maca home to find out where she lives. She and I were partners in all the drills.

I discovered that Jen is not such a sweet person when she's tired. She snapped at me four different times as I tried to help with volleyball and Spanish, and I ended up just giving her space. She was in a “New Zealand is right, Chile and America are wrong” mood, complaining about meal times, Chilean food, and school schedules. She also decided that she'd rather be rude and reach than ask politely for the family to pass things at lunch. I really hope it's just a stage.

Daniela's birthday party was interesting. It started out as lots of fun with danceable music on her gorgeous patio. We chatted, snacked, and grooved. I was told that my style of dancing gives away my age, but I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. Naturally, Daniela ended up in the pool, but she had already taken her shoes off in expectation or anticipation. Then the party went downhill. An overabundance of pisco left the majority drunk, and then the puking started. Jen and I rubbed Coco’s back and held her hair while she occupied the bathroom, and that was after two accidents on the floor before we got there. Fifteen year olds should never be that smashed.

Sunday, March 14th

Wow am I sore! After an early-morning Tae Kwon Do practice and a quick dip in the pool, the strain on my muscles begins to make itself known. I was worried that Helga would wake the house, but even her annoying barks couldn’t interrupt the slumbering beauties.

I found a recipe for cinnamon rolls and Carola asked me to make them to take to her friend Ann’s for once. I really love kneading dough, and they turned out well, although the topping was a little sweet for my taste. Carola loved them. I was amazed to bring only half of the sugary concoction home since the menu also consisted of chocolate and candy, manjar, brownies, apple tart, pastries, cinnamon rolls, chocolate cake, muffins, and crêpes. I had crêpes with Nutella, as authentically French as you can get without a beret in a Spanish speaking country. Four of the guests were actually French and we had a blast joking around the tea table.

Jen and I had lunch with Jessie and Teresa (Oklahoma) at Falabela because our friend from Talca had to catch a bus, but wanted to see us before she left. We all ended up with KFC chicken wraps, three out of the four wrapped with lettuce, mayo, and a tortilla although mine lacked the tomatoes. We had to wait for the bike marathon to pass us by at a dazzling pace before we could cross the street. I was amazed at the number of bikes making the many day journey up the length of Chile, and they weren't leisurely peddling along either.
Cinnamon Rolls  
Panecillos de canela

Dough: ½ oz dry yeast  
1c warm milk  
2 eggs  
5T butter (melted)  
½ c sugar  
1t salt  
5c flour

Sauce: ½ c butter  
1c brown sugar  
1c corn syrup  
½ c chopped pecans  
Filling: 2T butter (melted)  
½ c sugar  
1t cinnamon

- For dough, dissolve yeast in milk. Add eggs, butter, sugar, salt, and 3c flour. Knead into smooth, elastic dough, adding remaining flour (6-8 minutes). Let rise in greased bowl for 1 hour.
- Sprinkle pecans in greased 9” x 13” baking pan. Boil remaining sauce ingredients for 2 min and pour over nuts.
- Punch dough down. Roll into a 17” x 15” rectangle. Spread with butter from filling. Sprinkle with cinnamon sugar. Roll up jelly roll style. Cut into fifteen slices and place rolls over sauce so that the swirl is visible. Let rise for ½ hour.
- Bake 30min at 350º
- Let stand 5min before inverting rolls onto a serving platter.

Monday, March 15th

Seven months in Chile.

Ouch! Thinking about moving hurts. My legs were stiff when I woke up, but after physical training in gym class followed by an hour and a half of volleyball, I’m officially very sore. Jen actually skipped out on practice because she didn’t feel well, and besides, it wasn’t worth the effort to trek into town to buy her knee pads. We played a neat speed drill where we chased another teammate for “catching points,” starting out sprawled our stomachs. We had to do a lot of sit-ups for lazy sloppiness, as well as for getting caught.

Carola bought Soprole yogurt just for me and boosted our granola supply without even being asked. Hurray. I’m happy! But not just for food. She's so much more of a friend now that she's relaxed.

The hot milk, with or without Emily’s gourmet Godiva cocoa, is working wonders on my sleeping habits. I sleep through the night almost every day now. Last night I dreamed that I had to switch houses, and I loved the new family, but didn't want to leave the Correas. I wonder if the milk will bring back my dreams too? I don’t dream nearly as much in Chile as I do in Ohio.

Tuesday, March 16th

Carola and Teco's anniversary! Teco sent roses, but Carola arrived at the same time as the delivery truck and had to carry them in herself. Maxi drew hearts all over the back of the card.

I took the Don Juan Tenorio test and my sorry 4.5 was still the fifth best grade in our class of sixteen. Then my classmates organized a skip day for our fill-in chemistry class by talking to the Professor and to Ricardo. The deal was that if everyone skipped, the directors wouldn't say anything, but if one person showed up the rest would be counted absent without cause. Needless to say, Jen and I stayed home. She took advantage of having no boys around to get some computer time while I rushed two letters to the grandparents. Jana was coming at 4:30 and Jen still needed knee pads and artisan ice cream, which resulting in a speed walking trip to the center and back.

Carola told me that Matias is having a rough time with headaches and feels lonely in New Zealand. I sent him a froggy e-card that I found adorable. I suggested that even though we all feel a bit like fish out of water in the beginning, he should be like a good little frog and jump from one good thing to the next, avoiding everything that can dampen our lives. I hope it makes him feel better. Unfortunately, headaches and fatigue are a common part of the exchange experience, at least in the beginning.

Wednesday, March 17th

Jen’s snappiness is shocking. After sugar and spice all summer I’m having trouble adjusting to mood swings of an unconsiously
grouchy when sleepy Jen. Too bad we can't start school around 11am! The worst part is that I never know when it's coming. One second she's perkily exploring new Spanish words and asking a bazillion questions, most of which would never cross my mind or I have absolutely no way of knowing, and the next time I suggest something, she attacks. I understand that it bothers her when people just assume that she knows nothing, but I'm too good at making mountains out of molehills and snapping stings and sticks. Today I was so excited to share something I read in Spanish, but she wanted no part of it. In her own words, “She's a very good rain cloud.”

I just discovered that you can tell the origin of Oriental dragons by counting their toes. Chinese dragons have five digits, the Korean monsters claim four, and the Japanese variety wound up with only three. The ancient Indians had three official marriage rituals: Swayamvara where a woman was presented with a line of prospective spouses and got to take her pick; Gandharva Vivaha, a union of love; and Asura Viviha where the groom abducted the bride. I miss being able to come home and spout out the cool things I learned at school. Here in Chile, I get a lot of weird looks both for my unusual passion for crazy facts and my random outbreak of songs in the middle of the street.

The lentils are doing well and Jen has a perfect tactismo example even though she hasn't even touched her box. Carola has been watering and unfortunately, turning the beans, but not too much harm done. Naturally, I was the only one to bring my project in on time and the history research presentations had the same results.

Ricardo says he's going to miss me and mentioned organizing a goodbye tournament. Practice flew by as we hopped benches, climbed/crawled under hurdles, and drilled until we could no longer breathe. Even I'm exhausted and reverting to walking at the end. The girls were calling me la araña during the relays because they thought I moved like a spider. Eww! Thanks for the compliment, but no thank you.

Kristin came over with photos of her novio and her family as well as the latest gringa gossip. Jacqueline broke trust with her host family and is basically under house arrest for the rest of her exchange. She didn't exactly tell the truth about her weekend activities and her mom found out that she didn't sleep at Emily’s. I didn't help that she had snuck into Lindsey’s house and therefore no one could verify her story without getting another exchange student in trouble so the worst is being assumed. I was tired, smelly, hungry, and not in the mood to listen to condescension about a friend. Poor Jacqueline. She made a big mistake.

Thursday, March 18th

Half of 3ºA spent English class in the library as punishment for wearing pants ahead of season. I smiled at my own slacks, once again glad to be “special.” These dress code rules are way too confusing. The Starbursts for Coco's birthday were a big hit, especially after they realized it was okay to take more than one. The bag disappeared in no time and almost caused us to miss chemistry. We were enjoying a sunny spot of grass and the teacher closed the door on us.

After math my brain was on overload and I opted to skip jogging for a good ice cream. Jen graciously agreed to accompany me, and we both sat chatting in the plaza, munching our pistachio/vanilla amaretto waffle cones.

Later, Maxi was showing off his math skills and I taught him how to subtract with borrowing. He is really bright. I also taught Jen about the seconds and minutes in geometry angles and explained some equations to Coco. It was a good teaching day.

My return flight takes off May 19th, and I'll be hugging my family again on the 20th. I was amazed at how excited I felt to think about seeing my family again in just two months. I'm very happy here, but Dorothy was right, there's no place like home.
Friday, March 19th

Jen and I walked to the center with a list of errands and the only thing I managed to accomplish was to buy a new toothbrush. Jen helped me pick it out because she reasoned that pink would be better color-coordinated with our bathroom. She got new shampoo and couldn't resist the call of the ice cream shop. I had to pass because Ricardo had chosen me as one of six girls to practice with the guys. We did lots of elega drills where your partner throws the ball short and you have to sprint to get the bump and then backpedal to start again. However, our main purpose was to serve and as a bonus we scrimmaged. My body is exhausted from unexplained 1:30 wakeups and the “I need sleep” headache had set in, but there was no way I was wimping out of the honor.

Jessie borrowed our Internet while no one was home and then tagged along to La Fiesta de la Vendemia to celebrate the wine harvest. Alianza Francesa is selling crépes for the gira fund to finance their senior trip, but I was a traitor and bought a chocolate almond plum tart instead. The cookie was yummy, but I could have done without the marmalade. We walked to the center with Tere and the boys, and Maxi caused us all to laugh. I told him that it wasn’t far, only five or six blocks, and he looks at me in all seriousness and said, “That's more than four.”

Saturday, March 20th

I chatted with Dad and Katie while sending out an update and checking into some Miami University stuff. I am now officially reaccepted, but Mom has to turn in my housing and meal plan decisions.

Two hours of volleyball was followed by a cauliflower snack and a walk to the plaza where I was meeting Jen for lunch. I had to bypass the tennis club to give the boys keys, but they were at a different court this week. All in all, I’ve walked miles this weekend and my guess would be six in the last two days.

We had churipan and an ice cream for lunch and then I took my exhausted self home. The boys and I snuggled to watch “La Sirenita,” and I painted my nails purple just for fun. Naturally, that’s when Ernesto invited me over to meet his hijo, Jeremy. This former exchange student and current Princeton scholar chose to spend his one week of spring break back in Curico. We had a fun time buying bread and fretting over which cake to choose. I eventually did a random point and accepted any possible guilt for a bad pick, but it's hard to mess up mil hojas. Believe me, we were quite entertained by the escapades of last year (the stories Rotary never knew). It was neat to see the connection that Jeremy has with his host family and his Chilean friends. What's amazing is that
three of my friends are starting to think seriously about marrying Chileans and spending the rest of their lives south of the Equator. My lips are sealed for the year, but let's just say that some of the romances are already brewing, but two of the girls are still working on the kissing record and don't want to get picky yet. My quick visit turned into an *asado* and my host family had disappeared by the time I got home.

Sunday, March 21st

I snipped all the intriguing recipes from Taste of Home as the family got ready to head out for tennis, including the famous cinnamon rolls. I was surprised to discover that Jen wasn't even home. She had gone clubbing with Jana and stayed for lunch. The rest of us went to the *campo* and lazed about thinking up bribes to encourage the kids to get good grades. I asked if they'd give me a trip to Chile if I scored a perfect 7, but Carola said I can come whenever I want, or whenever I can afford a ticket, no matter what my grades.

I brought Jen a rose and a piece of chocolate to show that she was missed. Then she and I settled down on the couch to watch *Miss Simpatica* better known as “Miss Congeniality,” while I waited for Mom to call. Unfortunately, the boys had left the phone off the hook, but I babbled away as soon as I fixed the connection. The excitement is amazing!

Teco wants Carola to practice English on me before she loses her private tutor, but I think she's a bit hesitant to embarrass herself. However, she did say that we'd start tomorrow.

Monday, March 22nd

We had a surprise oral quiz in French, and we all had to stand up and speak for two minutes. I managed a 7, but I also threw in two Spanish words before realizing that they weren’t French. Oops.

At lunch, Jen left the table and retreated to her bedroom in tears. She's exhausted. On top of that, she still doesn’t understand much and is a bit homesick. Needless to say, Teco’s planned reprimand about general sloppiness and stashing trash under the bed didn't happen. I stayed with her until she felt a little better, and then hurried off to school. I was still late, but having special privileges as an exchange student has its advantages. Jen took the time to rest and check e-mails. Her cover story was that she had some family things to do while the boys weren’t home on the computer.

Gym was an endurance test of four four minute jogs plus a warm-up, which amounted to about 4 km. Daniela and I could definitely feel the exhaustion creeping in, but it was a good sweaty practice at volleyball too. Jen is being tempted to join the basketball practices “when she feels like it.” Her size is a good asset and the similarity to netball, a New Zealand favorite, is drawing her in.

Tuesday, March 23rd

Castellano dragged on for an eternity, dampening the morning in general. I had to speak about American Indians in history, and I'm afraid that I blew it. There were a lot of blank looks, although Coco assured me that I did well. It didn't help that Señor Pardo had taken away my dry erase board, and therefore my visual aids. The cancellation of chemistry in the afternoon brightened the day considerably as I hopped out of my uniform and into Shelly clothes.

With my free time, I finished our philosophy novel, *Siddhartha*. Set in ancient India, it followed the life of a wise man searching for inner truth and peace. He experiences religion, deprivation, and pleasure to the fullest before finally finding true wisdom in the river, the river of life. He learns to love and accept things as they are without expectations. It was really good, my eleventh novel in Spanish.

Jacqueline had her birthday once with *completos* and an apricot *manjar torta*, along with an assortment of pastries. Friends showed up in abundance, both of the *gringa* and Chilean varieties. It was a true sign of sharing as she blew out her candles, because
the wafer/meringue chips flew everywhere and I happened to be sitting right in line of fire.

After hooking up the new printer, I helped Carola peel peaches for preserves. I asked her if something was bothering Teco. He had started blowing up at me for locking the garden gate when Carola asked me to. The next thing I know Teco walks in and Carola says, “Shelly wants to know why you're in a bad mood.” I wanted to sink through the floor!

Wednesday, March 24th

_Feliz Cumpleanos_ Maxi! I woke him up with that thought and left some American coins and an IOU for ice cream on the bed for him to find.

Jen was judging the Chilean culture on its serious lack of sandwiching. When I pointed out that they practically live on ham and cheese, _lomitos, churrascos, and hamburguesas_, she got defensive and very Katie-like in refusing to bow down in the face of logic. According to the dictionary of Jen, a sandwich must contain two pieces of untoasted bread with some sort of filling in the middle. Open or halved bread slices are not considered and both rolls and buns were also denied recognition, cutting off peanut butter banana treats and the good old sub. Her argument weakened further with the necessity of lettuce or tomatoes to acquire the title, especially since she's a fan of peanut butter and jelly and I support egg and cheese breakfasts on toast.

Even though I had a French exposition to write and a test to study for, I accompanied Carola to the campo to help with Maxi’s birthday party. He only had five friends over, but they made enough noise for twenty or thirty. It was fun watching them play and have a great time. Naturally, I arrived a little late for volleyball. After all, I am in Chile, but some things are worth sharing with the family without fretting about the time.

The general consensus seems to be that Shelly is now fat. “Much fatter than when I last saw you” is the usual comment. Luckily, Carola is still supporting me with, “No, she's fine and looks nice.” I swear the weight issue needs psychiatric help here. I'm still six pounds underweight and all my clothes still fit except my tight jeans, which I blame on volleyball. I’ve gained a kilo since practices started three weeks ago and it all went to the crouching muscles.

Thursday, March 25th

I was struggling against my runny nose all morning. It was awful. Every _recreo_ I had to run to the restroom to stock up my toilet paper tissue supply. Yet despite my crummy feelings, I think I did well on both the chemistry and history tests and my brain definitely showed the strain. I came home and crashed on the patio cushions. Yesterday, I got a 5.4 on my math test, and my teacher shook her head saying that it should have been a 7. In fact, it was. I had put all the answers on the exam itself and she had marked all my half finished work wrong. Unlike Mr. Locke, she hasn't learned to take my mental math for granted and still doubts me when I make a correction on her worksheets, but I did get my 7.

I talked to Madame Michelle and now have independent study work on Thursdays instead of sitting through another French 2ºB class. It couldn't have come sooner since I started receiving love notes today. The sad part is that they weren’t even cute, just annoying 16-year-olds trying to disrupt class. They could’ve at least tried poetry!

Friday, March 26th

I decided to take advantage of not going to English class and went out jogging after waking up Jen and the boys. According to Jen, they were much grumpier and slower without sister Shelly to ready their milk.

Jen and I had pizza with Javiera, Coco, Bernadita, Chica (Isabel), Grillo (Natalia), and Caro. It was a bit of a letdown after promises of _lomita paltas_, but you have to go with the flow. We spent the afternoon watching a pirated copy of “_La Pasión de Cristo._” It was awful, but I forced myself to watch the whole thing I cried, and couldn’t believe how the other girls were laughing, joking, and not respecting what the film stands for. I had to escape for a good think on my own. It's definitely not a movie that you
like or enjoy, but it makes an impact. I wish I had someone to share it with, but I'd rather not see it again.

Jen had her first bout of sleepwalking in Chile (that we know of) and woke up, cuddling her stuffed animals on the floor. Her pillow had come along, but otherwise the bed was all made up, although it was missing one sheet. She couldn't for the life of her remember where she could have hidden it and her wild searching didn't turn up any results. We had always joked that the nanas would make your bed in the morning whether you were in it or not, but sneaking in during the night is a little too much!

Saturday, March 27th

Thanks to an early night, I woke up fresh at 7am, rested and recharged. Before the family started stirring, I had already stretched, jogged, breakfasted on a strange mix of half a peanut butter and raisin sandwich and a quesadilla made from last night's leftover taco cheese, and nearly finished Chapter 4 of Katie’s sequel.

Lunch was an asado at Nicole's, and it was great to chat with her again. She seems to love Santiago even with the extra expenses and has gotten professional approval for her Spanish level. Her special tutor couldn't imagine what was left to be taught. It seems that there is also something brewing between her and Exe too.

She's helping him find work in Florida near her university and she’s planning to come back south with him for Christmas vacation. The bad thing is that she's noticeably lost weight to the point that she looks sickly and yet she was complimenting me on how healthy I look now after getting over my sickly stage. It was nice to hear, but I couldn't believe that she hadn't told me before that she thought I looked unhealthy. I blew off the Chileans as Chileans when Carola first mentioned her concerns to me, I would have listened to a friend. Lynz is also on a downward spiral after losing 4 kg in just four weeks.

Carola came home with slipper surprises. I now have sky blue moon and star fuzzies to keep my feet warm and the colds away. She's also keeping us well stocked with granola, which goes well with my yogurt addiction.

Mom, Dad, and Katie called a day early. I almost cried because I miss them and felt really low venting about my current problems my friends and with school. I love the challenges of the classes and Carola is helping me with my French dissertation, but I feel like I'm floating with my Spanish. Just like Nicole, I seemed to have reached a peak, but still yearn for more. I want to be fluent. Sadly, I'm never corrected and don't get that much speaking practice, just bits and pieces every day. Hurray for Katie! She took the phones away from my parents and brightened my day just like sisters can. I was glowing by the time she said goodnight. She was so excited to find out that I'd be home on May 19th and went on to forbid me from requesting meatloaf or tater tot casserole.

Sunday, March 28th

What a night. I woke up at 2am and finished off half the Spanish novel, a glass of water, and a Shelly size toasted cheese sandwich before falling back to sleep around 5am. It was neat how the ease of reading increased with each page, although my dictionary got a good workout because a collection of letters is a lot harder to follow than a standard story. I even managed to practice and recite my entire French dissertation at 3am.

The morning dawned nippy, windy, cloudy, and chilly. I had to break out my cuddly “Welcome to Chile” sweatshirt and pick up my skirt as we walked the sidewalks. Jen was searching for good jumping puddles, but to no avail. The rain and Teco’s miserable cold kept us home from the campo so we went to mass, picked up empanadas and Chinese food, a bizarre but tasty combination, and rented “El Señor de los Anillos.” Maxi traded in his birthday ice cream for six pieces of gum and we all shared two boxes of chocolate as we snuggled on the couch.

Carola brightened my day. I asked for suggestions on improving my Spanish and her reply amazed me. She had always been the one to answer a Shelly compliment with "No, she still has an atrocious accent and lots to learn," but today she looked me in the eyes and said, "No, Shelly, your Spanish is really really good."
The only thing you could work on now is your pronunciation." She suggested more TV and movies in Spanish with which I was more than happy to comply. Jen and I have been going from house to house borrowing Disney movies from our relatives and then snuggling down on the couch to watch them. Maxi is obsessed too. As soon as a movie ends, he's up, quick as lightning, to rewind and start it anew.

Monday, March 29th

We did cross-country for gym class, which in Chile means running an obstacle course of bleachers, benches, and soccer fields. Jen is the first person I've ever met who could get a cramp in her foot, but at least it got her out of the exercise.

Carola was helping me with my pronunciation while she put the finishing touches on Caro's prom dress. I had to read her a “cuento del alma” and she fixed me without letting anything slide. My toughest word is todo. If I get the “o” right, the “d” is wrong and vice versa. Then I had to practice reading the story again and looking up vocabulary for a follow-up quiz. I gave Carola Jen’s copy of Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul to look over because it’s her turn tomorrow.

Tuesday, March 30th

The highlight of the day was Mom’s doing. As we sat down to lunch, a package arrived for me and I assumed that it was my camera, but upon closer inspection, the address appeared in Mom's handwriting with a Florida return address. My best guess was Easter sweets, but I was wrong. I carried the box to my room with three minutes to spare before school and tore open the paper. I think Jen was more excited than I was and that's saying something. The box’s only content was one large and perfect jar of Peter Pan peanut butter. The tears started running down my face and I nearly sobbed as I had to explain to Jen why my mom would send such a thing. “I was rationing myself because we had so little left and you like it so much and it's so expensive for the Correas.” That was the closest I got to the truth. I was overcome with love and longing for the mom who would defy a “Don't send me anything” order just to make her daughter happy. I think she knows me and my heart better than I do.

I was right about Jen's reaction though. Her recent consumption level has decreased dramatically faced with the fact that she would need to ask the Correas for more when she ran out, but when my jar arrived, she quickly fixed herself two well-stocked sandwiches. I've decided that the peanut butter will live in my room. I will share and she can gobble it all when I leave, but for right now, I need to treasure my love inspired gift. How many people glow with the gift of peanut butter?

I was so tired that I had to blow off homework and studying for tomorrow's tests. I just couldn't do more and decided not to kill myself when the grades don't matter anyway. I now know that there's a very good reason that I don't like horror films. Carola wanted to watch “The Ring,” and I sat down to be with her. An hour later, I'm still as tense as can be and my tripas are in knots.

I love my mother!

Wednesday, March 31st

Hurray for wonderful parents. I think I did rather well in my philosophy test and then the history professor didn't come to class, giving us an early morning. Jen and I walked to the center to pick up my photos, look for her carnets (Chilean ID), which is still lost somewhere in Santiago, and post more of Jen’s letters home. A big package from Dad was waiting for me, loaded with goodies: my new camera (the boys had accidently destroyed the first), Hershey's chocolate, two boxes of nutty bars, and another huge jar of peanut butter. I'm guessing that Mom and Dad didn't talk to each other before they sent my special surprises. Luckily, this jar of Jif made me laugh instead of cry like the Peter Pan did, and I told Jen she could now snack as much as she wanted. Unfortunately, that was right after going through the “you have to share nice and be responsible for yourself” speech. Bad timing, but it did need to be said and she claims that she'd rather fix the problem and that her feelings weren’t too bruised.
I showed Kristin my new treasures too, but all the non-peanut butter lover could say was, “Couldn't you have bought it here?” She obviously didn't catch the sentimental value of my peanut butter in spite of the silliness. My secret yearning must've been clearer than I thought. I couldn't wait until volleyball ended to munch my first nutty bar in Chile, which was just as good as I remember, or even better.

The senior class started appearing in school today. Pelao gave me a great hug, although he got in a huff when I didn't insist that our curso was/is the ultimate best. Alé was very excited having seen the Pope and brought me a saintly necklace pendant back. The general consensus is that Italy is the best country to visit, but I'm waiting for more stories and hopefully personal experience to know for sure.

Thursday, April 1st

If Kristin can have a puppy for a pet in Chile, I guess I can have a mouse. I woke to the sound of gnawing and turned on the bedside lamp to see the little rodent eating away at my door, trying to get out. He fled for cover in the light, but he was back to dinner as soon as I flipped the switch and the darkness returned. After that I even dreamed about the mouse and had to think for a while in the morning, trying to separate dream from reality. Carola thought I was imagining things since they've never had a mouse in the house before, but she gave Tere orders to search my room top to bottom. When I got home from school, everything was spick and span, and every last inch of my un-privacy had been rustled through including my goodies stash with presents. Carola insists that my food brought the mouse even though it is all bagged and sealed. Never mind the plethora of food in the kitchen and patio. Gundi saw the mouse too, so I have another witness.

I got a 7 on my chemistry test, top in the class, and my friends started complaining about me breaking the curve. Besides that, I wouldn't cheat and tell 3ºA what was on the history test. I’m such a bad gringa.

We had panqueques de acelga for lunch, which were good enough for second helpings. Yum!

Friday, April 2nd

I'm beginning to like Thursdays and Fridays. I get to stay home until my classes start and usually get to jog or practice my Tae Kwon Do and shower before leisurely breaking my fast with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I've been relishing my peanut butter all this week.

Jen, Carola, and I went over to Ernesto's to look over next year's exchange students and help translate the English applications. Of the seven kids, two want to be president, one picked Enders Game as a favorite book and another’s favorite author was Ayn Rand. I had to groan at that last one and got lots of raised eyebrows. I took Jeremy's job and wrote the official welcome to Curicó e-mail, offering myself as a contact if they had any questions. Ernesto also asked me to make the “thank you very much” Rotary speech at the end of April.

Teco decided on a whim to take us to the Chilean circus, Tachuelas. It was fantastic. The fat clown dawdled through his makeup for half an hour, giving the audience time to be fashionably late. It was definitely a Chilean show with authentic Moulin Rouge dancing and lots of thong-like leotards. The acrobats were amazing, flipping guys three levels into the air to form human towers. There was one young clown, the son of a Tachuela, that stole the show. He had a great voice, played saxophone, trumpet, and piano, kept the audience rolling, and made the three-story leap to the top of the tower. His name was Agustin. Carola took our picture together, and after chatting about his July trip to Florida, he gave me a glowing star headband as a "remember me" gift. He kept smiling at me the rest of the night and even gave me a special wave. I enjoy being a girl. He's so talented that I’d love to get to know him better and can’t help wondering what he'll be doing tomorrow. Is this a crush? Am I my falling in love with a clown?
Saturday, April 3rd

I finished Chapter 5 of Katie's sequel before volleyball. Teresa showed up at practice, slightly bewildered. She had taken the bus from Talca to meet Jessie's family, but they were not to be found, and the pre-made plans for her to sleep over at our house was news to me.

We met Lindsay at Falabela, grabbed an ice cream cone, and ended up at Kristen’s. I should've stuck with a nutty bar. The peanut butter obsession is still going strong, and I was trying to conserve, but ice cream can’t compare.

I'm afraid that my day went downhill from there. It's amazing to me how petty girls can be at times. All they wanted to do with gossip and complain, and in English to boot. I quickly got tired of it. It didn't help that Jen and I were experiencing a little friction again. She's tired and sick, and therefore, bipolar. I don't take snappage well and ended up early in bed while Vicky, Linz, Teresa, and Jen made plans to go to the disco.

Sunday, April 4th

Maxi, Estevan, and I watch “101 Dalmatians” before the others began to stir, and I walked to Bryc for fresh bread with my perfect gentleman of a cousin. The plan was to have a big family lunch in our garden, but I was halfway through the apple dumpling dessert when we changed our minds. We rushed to pack a picnic lunch and piled into the Gimena van on our way to the Siete Tazas. We had real sandwiches, complete with lettuce, ham, and cheese, but Jen wasn't in the mood. I had to laugh. The autumn hike reminded me of Ohio as we swished through the fallen leaves.

The cascades are pretty, but I loved rock hopping along the river. I did slip and drench myself twice, but that's just part of the adventure. On the way back, the hike seemed to last forever, and I realized that we had never passed “that rock” before. Lola and Carola, our markers for the trail, had decided to return early, leaving a small note so that we wouldn't worry. Unfortunately, we hadn’t seen the note and had missed the trail. Faustino started crying and the other girls were tired and irritated with the extra exercise. The gringas were the steadiest hikers and Jen laughed at my one wet footprint on the rocks. My apparent stride was pretty impressive.

With Teco’s Fuji apples, I think we may be flirting with the record for the world's largest apple dumpling.

Monday, April 5th

My classmates were really not happy with me today. I got 47 out of 45 points on the physics test, which really ruined the curve. They were quite insistent that I throw the test a bit next time, but if I'm not going to try my best, why bother? I think the Starbursts help us make up a bit, but I was disappointed with their “give me” lack of manners. My French presentation also went well with the extra week’s delay, but my gringa accent brought down the pronunciation points.

Carola read me some Chicken Soup for the Soul. The “th” sound is very hard for her as well as the “-ed” of past tense, but she did very well. It's blatantly obvious that she's Chilean, but so what. It was a lot of fun helping her and then it was my turn and I got to work on my Spanish “t” and “d.”

I finally finished Werther. Hurray! That collection of letters dragged on far too long for my liking.

Tuesday, April 6th

Jen shared and now I have a cold. It was a day of toilet paper runs to stop my dripping nose and a lot of watch watching during my classes. A nutty bar and an hour’s worth of chat time with Mike and Laura, along with two cups of chamomile tea, helped brighten the day. I also snatched bits and pieces of “Harry Potter” with Jen between phone calls and dinner preparation.
The homework load is massive. I had biology and philosophy investigations to write, as well as physics research. Go figure, the computer didn't like me again and I had to restart it twice, but finally I had my homework done and went to bed early.

Wednesday, April 7th

I no longer feel miserable, but my nose is still running a marathon. I bet I used a whole roll of toilet paper throughout the day and the boys were calling me clown nose. I did convince Carola that a hot bath and chamomile tea would do me a world of good, but if I'm not tiptop by tomorrow, I may resort to Chilean medicine. It just makes me nervous that they can get all their drugs over the counter and then self medicate. The boxes don’t even have instructions or symptoms listed just the scientific name of the pills.

Last-minute planning caused some hassle as I had to choose between playa and lago. A day ahead of time, I was given the option of spending the holidays at the beach with a bunch of Rotary exchange students or at Lago Vichuquen with my host family. I must admit that my cold had an influence in the decision. If someone had told me before coming to Chile that I would get in the habit of carrying a roll of toilet paper around in my backpack, I would have laughed, but last week was pretty miserable. Teco picked Jen and I up to go walking around the polo fields as he and Tata practiced their golf game (they can use as much practice as they can get) and I accidentally left the Kleenex substitute in my room. My grave error was soon obvious and I resorted to the redneck solution, fallen leaves. Jen was incredulous and burst out laughing as I came upon a particularly crispy specimen. She plans to make a bundle with a Kleenex commercial for the perfect tissue tree. I guess you can understand why I opted for a relaxing weekend getaway instead of sleepness nights by the chilly beach front.

Friday, April 9th

I am out of whack! I stayed blissfully in bed until 9:30 when my craving for a toasted cheese sandwich tempted me down the creaky stairs and out onto the dock in my PJs and bare feet. I was too tired to read, write, or walk so I just crashed on a beanbag and listened to the bird cries and waves of the shore. I even took a nap after a delicious lunch of roast corbina (fish) and spinach pastries. When I woke up, the house was empty without even a note of explanation so the gringas went for a walk. We were all lacking the “ganas” to do anything really productive so we dawdled and swung for a bit, amazed at the sky and the rocks. Nicole was in wondrous state while observing the nature around us.

Dinner was chupe de atun y camarones. I could have skipped the shrimps, but the rest reminded me of really good tuna noodle casserole. Nicole and I then proceeded to chat about life, Chile, and home until 1:45. It's bizarre, but for two days now I've had the urge to just stay up and talk.
Saturday, April 10th

What a great day! Once again I lazied in until 9:30 when the fresh pan amasado arrived. My energy was back and Jen, Nicole, and I walked through one of the neighbor’s bird sanctuaries. Teco urged the guard swan, “No se enoja, chiquitita,” but I liked the Cruella Deville and pharaoh impersonators best. We passed the paths, cutting trail to get to the arbor bridge and hopping rocks over the fish pond.

We went with Carola and Ximena to Vichuken where I finally fell in love with the greda, and I'm now the proud owner of three ceramic pieces just waiting to be painted. Carola bought us each a little lago witch to hang on our jackets and then we stopped at the local museum.

I took advantage of the sunny afternoon heat and threw myself in the lake for a swim. I had to skim the top until I’d safely passed the seaweed danger zone, but it was definitely worth it.

Lunch was yummy lasagna and salad. I discovered that the extra cream that I don't like on the pasta makes a very tasty salad topping. Then we had asado for dinner with baked potatoes. I was in love, eating all of mine, half of Nicole’s, and the skin off Carola’s. Later, they serves the kids manjar and frozen waffles, while I finished off all the leftover bread pieces, first with butter and then with manjar.

My classmate Pilar arrived as our neighbor with a passel of cousins and her sister, Cony. We had a great afternoon and chatted into the night as we watched for falling stars. I noticed that Gundi was feeling a bit solo as Maxi joined in with the little kids so I made a point to spend some extra attention on him. When I had to say, "No, you can't play with my digital camera," he called me "pesada" which basically means no fun, stick in the mud. Of course, I had to pretend to pout and wipe away the tears, and a few minutes later he showed up with my cell phone. I was pretty clueless, but he made me turn it on and I discovered a new welcome message, "Hola Shelly amorosa." I must have turned my phone off and on five or six times because I was so touched that he considered me sweet and lovable. He was glowing smiles too and we tramped down to the lake together.

We did a lot of star gazing from the dock, singing crazy songs and boggled by the fact that many had probably burned out and we didn't know it because the light was still on its way to Earth. “How do you like them apples?” said Nicole as she pondered the fact that what we were seeing didn't exist. Jen had never seen a shooting star before in her life, but Gundi won the contest with eight sightings. I was close behind with seven. As the moon rose over the tree line, Teco informed us that the bunnies would be getting off soon with all the chocolate eggs for Easter. I had always wondered how they got all over the world without magic reindeer, but according to Chileans, the Easter Bunny rides around the work on the moon.

I had my first Easter bunny experience as I helped Teco deliver our Easter baskets to the feet of our beds. They don't go searching in Chile. Carola had forgotten the real baskets in Curico so we made do with aluminum foil and the “baskets” shone with reflective love as well as light. I got and gave a long warm hug and went to bed. Part of me wanted to tear open the goodies at midnight, but I realized that it wouldn't be like Easter if I didn't wait until morning. As the moon rose, Jen made the very fitting comment that it was like watching Christ's resurrection.

Sunday, April 11th

Even though I missed Easter service and the traditional hymns my morning started out focused on the resurrection. Jen and I both woke up early to get Nicole to the bus station and the sky was cloudy as far as the eye could see. As we wound our way around the lake, the sun rose into a thin crack of light overlooking three misty hillsides. I was struck by the symbolism of the light of Jesus reappearing in the world after three days in the tomb. In New
Zealand, they actually celebrate Easter on Monday morning instead of Sunday. I'll have to research where that comes from.

Maxi woke to find his Easter basket at the foot of his bed, but turned to Gundi to ask what the baked potato was for.

It was Jen's three-month anniversary and she loved the Reese’s Cups I gave her. She was impressed with the super dark chocolate, but I warned her just in time to take the wrapper off first. They have no such candy in New Zealand, and nothing similar, but she's thinking of starting a suggestion list. Big Red gum is also on the list.

After a good salmon lunch, Jen and I joined Pilar and Cony to zip around the lake on a sailboat. The wind didn't want to cooperate, but we practiced their English in the calm moments and had a great time. I took the plunge and asked them the difference between my level of Spanish and Nicole’s because she's always getting compliments and I feel slightly handicapped for having to communicate with Jen so often in English. However, it seems that I still have the knack. Cony assured me that I speak well or even too well. Nicole fits in as Chilean with all the modismos and grammar twists, while I've kept to proper castellano. She says that I wouldn't be taken for a gringa so much as a Spanish speaker from another Latino country.

When we pulled back into dock, well soaked thanks to Teco and the speedboat, Pilar's dad took us skiing on the way back to the marina. I was the whole show, but the girls were dazzled as I danced the Macarena, wave hopped, used one ski, and paddled myself along side of my skis.

Monday, April 12<sup>th</sup>

It was a rainy day back in Curicó and Jen was all but wagging her tail with excitement. She spent the afternoon splashing in puddles and singing in the rain with her umbrella. She said she was even talking to herself in Spanish and that the language is starting to flow for her now. It would be nice if she tried her skills out on real people, like me, once in awhile. She still avoids answering direct questions and repeating something that was misunderstood, usually because her volume had been switched on too low.

I made a monster of a to-do list and spent every spare second of free time on homework, putting names on senior pictures, and recipe translation. Carola picked out eleven new recipes that she wants to try before I leave. I told her that all she had to do was buy the ingredients and I was ready to cook, but we’ll see how many dishes actually appear. I’ve been trying to cook for them all year without much success.

After volleyball practice, Jen thought that I had walked home in the rain, but I had really just sweated buckets. Ricardo teased that he was going to keep me so that I can’t go home until December. I wonder if he’ll let me out for games and practices?

Teco called Caro and it sounds like she's bored, homesick, and slightly troubled with her host family. From my room, I could hear that there were a lot of suggestions and advice given, but I had to laugh when Carola summed up the conversation later with, “She's perfectly happy and counting the days to come home.” I wonder what my parents tell people at home about me.

I improved the Chilean chocolate with peanut butter and fond memories of Mom. I was in the mood for toasted cheese, but cheeky Gundi ate the last of the queso and I had to spread peanut butter on my bread too.

Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>

In Chile, bad luck comes on Tuesday instead of Friday, but my day went really well. I crammed my vocab list in the morning. I was just going to ignore it because of the abstract and archaic words, but my Shelly-ness got the better of me and I had to give it my all. I was actually very happy with my Werther test. Only one question had a babbled clueless answer and the one vocab word I couldn't quite remember, I guessed right anyway. My reaction was more optimistic than my companions'.
Jen celebrated another rainy day while I worked on more homework and a Chilean update. The showers remind her of home and she was out all day yesterday splashing in puddles and singing in the rain. She had an umbrella (at least when Carola was watching) and actually pouted when Teco came to pick us up from school. She was looking forward to getting wet. It's strange to think that Ohio also has April showers, but the US version will be bringing May flowers that I'm anxious to enjoy. Third summer in a row, here I come!

Wednesday, April 14th
Ernesto has developed a trust in my translation skills and it seems that I now have a second job corresponding Rotary business. I've been working with the State of Georgia University scholarship program and now the same Rotary club is sponsoring Chilean hospitals to provide them with medical supplies that are lacking here. I'm very impressed with the program in general, lots of generosity among Rotarians.

Thursday, April 15th
Eight Month Anniversary!
Mom sent me an e-mail this morning, commenting that I must be getting homesick as the end approaches. It's true. I'm ready to go home. I'm still content and glad that I came to Chile, but I'm ready to go home. I think seven months would be an ideal exchange time.

After lunch, Carola, Jen, and I hopped in the car to drive to Santiago. My goal is to get as much of my shopping done this weekend as possible. Luckily, the rain stayed outside the city and we met Nicole in the lapis lazuli shops and then meandered through Patronato. Jen was all but grinding her teeth as Carola tried to be helpful. She would make a great shop clerk because she's very hard to say no to. Jen bought a llama pendant and copihue earrings to remind her of Chile’s national flower, Nicole fell in love with adorable underwear, and I had to get my daddy a “Te Quiero” puppy that will serve well as a Cleveland Brown's mascot. Getting out of the shopping district was an adventure in itself. Carola had left us to go visit the grand Buvi and Nicole was rather lost. The bus we were told to take didn't pass by the spot where we were told to wait, but after crossing back and forth across the bridge three times and asking five innocent bystanders, we arrived safely at Nicole’s place and got to drop our heavy packs. All our supplies for the weekend had journeyed with us all day in backpacks. Needless to say, we decided to forgo the sleeping bags and bath towels, throwing ourselves on the mercy of Nicole and her sisters. No problem, the girls loved the Easter egg chocolate I had packed as a present.

We grabbed a quick snack of bread and palta and then headed right to Parque Arauco where we got another dose of Yozen Fruz. Jen tried hers without sugar, and it's actually better with a more fruity taste. Then we hit the jackpot in the bookstore. Jen discovered Chocolate caliente para el alma. Instead of Chicken Soup for the Soul, Chileans drink hot chocolate. She bought one and I bought another. Then we found a shelf of novels written in English in a café. Let’s just say that Jen is very happy today. We had dinner at Tony Roma's with great cheesy baked potatoes, BBQ pork sandwiches, and ribs. Nicole actually resorted to eating the ribs with her fingers. We were proud.

Lightning split the sky as we looked over the twinkling city from the eleventh story stairwell. The windows are open to the air outdoors and I was intrigued by the beautiful and intense display of energy.

Friday, April 16th
I went with Nicole to her professional Spanish class and my English major tendencies were reinforced, despite the fact that we were studying a foreign language. I was intrigued as we studied
minute vocabulary and tore sentences apart. Then we walked to the tourism office for Chilean maps and pamphlets, grabbing a third copy for Jen.

*Pulmaque* was a great mall and feria. We started out with frozen yogurt, a mix of banana and peach today and then hit the shops. I found a cool wooden notebook booth and bought a cute turtle bookmark for myself. Nicole finally found her South American clock and splurged on Chilean instruments for her cousins. We ended the night in the food court with Chinese food and ESPN ice skating. Unfortunately, the sound was turned off, but I was excited anyway.

**Saturday, April 17th**

We started out in *El Museo de Bellas Artes*. Down in the basement, I amused myself by finding the Eagles in cryptic drawings. It blew my mind that they were framed upside down. The antique maps of South America were filled with sketched figures of native animals, ships, and a few monsters, but the form of the continent changed drastically over the years. Nicole and I have the same basic tastes. We both loved a painting of a family reading. Together they glowed with life and another of a park walkway that looked real enough to walk into and enjoy the shade of a big oak tree. I'm afraid Jen was bored stiff, but if she won't say what she wants, she sinks her own ship, and I'll make myself happy.

The long trek continued as we walked our tired little feet to San Cristobal. We climbed the hill in ferrocarril, chatting with American missionaries, but descended on the telefericos (gondolas).

Lunch consisted of Arabian food at Omar Khayyan. Our waiter was spectacular, explaining the entire menu to the clueless gringas. We eventually ordered *namura* (meat pasties), *hufitas de parra* (meat, rice, and curry wrapped up in grape leaves), *kabbab* (elongated meatballs with green onion), *jiar mae laban* (chopped cucumber in yogurt with powdered parsley), and fresh warm pitas. It was an adventure worth having.

My plans to return to Curicó tonight were squashed as Carola called and suggested that we stay till tomorrow and return with Buvi and Tata. That started a frantic round of phone calls to find a place to stay since Nicole's family had arrived to crash in the apartment and we no longer had bed space. Luckily, Sergio was home and delighted to have us.

The metro in Santiago is an underground city in itself.

**Sunday, April 18th**

I made it! I wanted to visit Taylor’s church, but when Nicole’s conscious made her stay home to say hi to her host family and Jen's desire to read e-mail overrode her intentions to accompany me, I braved the metro and micro alone, and survived! The difference in atmosphere between a Catholic and a Protestant worship service is phenomenal. Walking into the sanctuary was like walking into a family. Everyone wanted to say hi and welcome. Partner praying came as a shock when I realized that I still pray in English and the vocabulary stuck in my throat, but my partner was understanding and the praise music more than made up for it. These people had gathered to praise God and I was touched.

I now know why so many Chileans always call me Chely, easily confused by gringos to be Chile. In Chilean society, the “sh” sound is considered vulgar and common, only spoken by the lower class camposinos. Therefore, all my upper-class friends and relatives have been trained since birth to avoid saying Shelly and I have been Chely all year.

I managed to find my way back through the micro and metro stops to meet Jen and Nicole at the *Teatro Municipal*. I arrived just in time to buy three gallery seats. We had wanted better quality, but finding three together wasn’t possible so we ended up standing/perching on the seats in the wings. Despite aching feet after a marathon walking weekend, “El Lago de los cisnes” was well worth it. As we watched, I realized that male ballerinas don't
have legs; they have muscles. I also decided that I like the partner dances better than the group choreography and the ending actually caught us by surprise because we were still expecting more. Buvi and Tata picked us up from Sergio’s at 8pm and we arrived home around 11pm, just in time for a good chat with Carola and Teco.

Monday, April 19th
One month to go! I received a 6.1 on my Werther test and celebrated with myself and Jen, and then later with Mom and Mike on AOL. It was the top grade in the class. Then I got a 7 on French with two bonus points for being the only student to catch an irregular verb.

Jen’s new book, Chocolate Caliente, is very good, to the point that I may skip the next Spanish novel for class to finish Jen’s book before I leave. We'll see. Maybe I can do both.

I called Jacquelyn to borrow her video camera, and even though she wasn't home, the nana lent it to me anyway.

I got my diplomacy hours in tonight. Teco was quite upset about how ideonda Jen's room is. “It stinks” was the complaint I heard at least five times due to the fact she hoards dirty clothes in her room. Carola was much more tolerant, but still not content about the sloppiness in general. I admit that Jen doesn’t measure up to Shelly’s neat freak standards, but she's not that bad compared to the average teenager.

Carola taught me how to put a base on Mom’s ceramics and I still have one of six coats to go. I don't think it's a coincidence that Carola just finished a platter that's almost identical to what I want. She was very thoughtful to make me a model.

Jen did great at volleyball, improving her serve success rate by at least 100%.

Tuesday, April 20th
I passed PSU Castellano with the highest grade in the class! It definitely says something for my Spanish skills. My classmates were not thrilled, but all I could do was laugh as Martin went on a tirade trying to get my score thrown out. “Of course she did well, she’s fifty some years old. She's been in 3º about eight times and 4º at least five!” I didn't worry too much since the prof never curves anything anyway.

I put finishing touches on Mom's plate borders and Carola sketched my fruit. So far they look perfect and I'm really excited. We’ll just have to wait and see what happens when I get my hands on them.

Wednesday, April 21st
Jen is one sick puppy and opted for a day in bed instead of struggling through school. The biology teacher made a point to ask about her, but I assured him that she wouldn't be dying today and we continued the lesson.

I lost my cool and whacked Andres in the stomach today for which I am now a little ashamed. I was struggling to concentrate amid the general ruckus and he picked a bad time to ruffle through my hair. I think he was more shocked than anything, I don’t hit that hard, but we made friends again just in time for math class.

The rain came down in buckets with bonus thunder that had the girls screaming. I started painting my fruit, yellow to start with and then adding colors on top. I'm quite proud although Carola has been fixing as we go along. It reminds me of old times getting art help from Mom. The only thing missing is the tears.

Thursday, April 22nd
It was refreshingly sunny, although the grass is still too wet to stretch out on and watch the clouds float by. I started the day with a jog and toasty grain bread. I think my studying, procrastinated though it was, paid off for my history test and I was proud to make two corrections in chemistry even though I'm just learning the material and I'm a week behind.

Coco came over after school to work on our philosophy project. She is such a sweetheart! It would have been so much easier to choose a Chilean partner and cut-and-paste the project together, but she picked me even considering my language barrier. At least you can't claim that I didn't do my share. I've spent hours
working on this project, trying to translate the psychological mumbo-jumbo into understandable Spanish. Jen roused me from my homework daze, just in time for Gilmore Girls, which was well worth the break.

Teco made a point to mention how grateful we should be to live with his family because it seems Caro has no food in her house. The host parents work all day and have dinner before they come home, and when she mentioned the lack of food, they said she had her glass of milk and should be fine. The truth is that I'm very grateful for this family, and they know it. He didn't have to tell me what to think and feel which raised my hackles!

Matias seems to be lonely. He's been calling Chile very regularly and talking with whoever will listen. Poor kid. I hope he adjusts and makes the most of his experience.

Friday, April 23rd

My lazy Friday lasted fifteen minutes and then I got up, crammed for my French exposé, wrote half a Chilean update, and discovered the recipe for panqueques de acelga.

Jen was my professional camera crew as I started my home video and we had a lot of fun. Sometimes she even remembered to remove the cap. The video is rather rough around the edges, but I think my family will like it. We had to ask special permission and beg a little to record at Bryc, but we managed. I made an oops as I was going through the house. The nanas don't understand English so they couldn't answer my spontaneous questions until I translated them into Spanish. It was really hard to keep the project secret as I chatted with my family on the phone, but the surprise is still intact.

My task for Ernesto today was finding used fire trucks for sale on the Internet. His desire for Shelly assistance is growing in leaps and bounds.

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Saturday, April 24th

The Rotary president picked us up right on time to go to the district conference. I was expecting an official affair with formal wear and prestige, but most of the Rotarians ignored the speakers, we had not so hot mashed potatoes from a box cafeteria lunch, Jen and Veronique were cookie-less at the coffee break, and we exchange students were less than well informed. I did get to talk to some interesting people though: Bostonians studying with the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship Program and members of the youngest Rotary club in Chile. Their president claimed that he wanted to marry me, but I think I’ll have to decline. My speech went well although I was shaky at first, but they laughed in the right places, which is a very good sign.

Panqueques de Acelga
Spinach Crepes

For sauce: Mix together all ingredients
Add thickener in small intervals to avoid clumping.
For crepes, mix ingredients together. Heat a lightly greased skillet.
Cook until solid.
For filling, set spinach aside and sauté the rest of the ingredients.
Add spinach and 1/3 of sauce mixture.
Divide filling, rolling spinach mixture inside crepes like a burrito.
Line crepe rolls seam side down on a greased baking sheet.
Cover with remaining sauce and sprinkle with grated cheese (if desired).
Bake until golden.
We took a bus to SolyMar, Mantagua just in time to settle into our cabins, play two and a half games of manipulation, and have dinner. Most of us were starving by that point. I sat by Liza, the new Brazilian who’s already fluent in Spanish. Valerie from Austria is fluent too. Sigh… I still have so much more to learn.

We watched the Rotary home-video and had an informational, what was good/what can be improved session. Communication was the biggest issue which showed through in the “We understand, but…” responses to our suggestions. However, I still think we made a difference. Sergio mentioned an interesting cultural observation: When Chileans say no, it's normal to urge and wheedle five or six more times until the person eats the piece of cake, gets in the car, accepts the present, etc. but in the US, no means no, and if a person passes an opportunity, it's because he or she really doesn't want to do it.

Our luck ran out with our cabin neighbors. The six or seven guys were already drunk and blaring the heavy rock music at 7pm. I was about to tell them off when Teresa reminded me that it might not be too smart and we found the owner instead. His “harsh scolding” wasn’t at all effective, so we just ignored the invitations for a sleepover and declarations of love and practiced sleeping through future college parties.

Sunday, April 25th
We spent the morning in Valparaiso.

It was a day of writing down memories and realizing that we’d never see a lot of our friends again. The full rainbow was like a sign of the fantastic dream reaching its end as the colors reach the ground.

When we got home, I was met with a sweet surprise. Gundi came up behind me and gave me a hug saying that I’m leaving too soon and that he’ll miss me. Of course, he mentioned the lack of a birthday present too, but the feelings are real. Later, I went to bed and found my cell phone on the table with a note attached: Préndeme. When I turned it on, the welcome message had changed to “Hola, Shelly amorosa y simpatica. I was really touched and he got another hug. Dinner consisted of lots of cabbage and peanut butter bread. I wasn't surprised to find six of the cabbage rolls still in the fridge.

Monday, April 26th
I took the video camera to school and had a variety of reactions. The little kids were thrilled to be on tape and Pancho introduced himself three times, but a lot of the guys suddenly turned camera shy.

Jen mentioned several times how she'd like to get out of gym so when Teco mentioned that it was the last day of the grape harvest, I mentioned that we might be interested in going along to watch. It was amazing how fast the hands of the pickers could snip the last bunches off the vine and Jen and I got to taste the leftovers I like wine grapes. We visited the apple orchards too and Teco nearly panicked when his numbers wouldn't add up. Jen and I got to take a nice walk, but the afternoon dragged on. I would've preferred gym, but Jen was happy.

Tuesday, April 27th
I quickly discovered that the color-coded system of the Chilean all-in-one cold medicine is more than just a diversionary tactic, contrary to popular Chilean belief. Carola told me to take a white day pill before bed since we were out of blue and I found myself wide awake at 1:30. Through the course of the night, I snacked on cereal, an apple, and half a cheese sandwich while finishing my history project, reading Chocolate Caliente, translating for Ernesto, and starting my scrapbook.

My dissertation for psychology went really well. Coco and I scored a 7 even though my classmates snickered as I Americanize some of the technical terms.

My daddy is so cute with his daily countdown. I told him to shine up his dancing shoes so he can celebrate when I get off the plane. Gundi is up there on my cute list too. He's getting clingy with lots of hugs. Today he asked me if I really wanted to go home, and although I’ll miss him, the answer is still yes. We are planning on cramming in some bonding time though. At lunch, he
asked if I'd let him teach me tennis and tonight he wanted to go kayaking, especially with me.

Wednesday, April 28th

Andres and Martin are anxious for me to leave, or so they say, so that they can get the curve back on their tests. I scored a 6.7 on Chilean history and a 7 on a philosophy presentation. I also earned praise from the biology teacher for beating the Chileans at their own game.

I was so proud of Jen today, she gave her New Zealand presentation completely in Spanish. She spoke in a well understood Spanish for a good half hour, only botched three words, and asked for help twice. It was quite an accomplishment.

I chatted with Mike instead of checking e-mails. There weren't any anyway. It was nice to laugh. He said he was proud of what I've chosen to do and the positive way I lived through it. It was a nice compliment. Gundi interrupted my journal writing just to come in and be near me. We talked a while and he clung a bit. I feel so loved. I also gave Carola the brownie mix that I had bought at UniMarc. She had mentioned them a few times and I'm trying to give back a little of what I've received this year. She protested that I shouldn't be spending my money like that, but she's worth it. I started white washing Grandma's bowl this afternoon and she added three more coats while I was out and about.

Thursday, April 29th

I loved the Pablo Neruda play we watched in town today even though most of my Chilean classmates (typical teenagers) were bored stiff. It was a one man skit featuring a myriad of Neruda works and I was impressed by the actor’s sense of pause. Throughout the performance, he quoted Neruda poems while going through numerous stages of the poet’s life. I liked the words words to one poem so much that my Spanish teacher promised to find a copy for me. He thinks that it’s called “Las Palabras,” but he’ll have to do some research to be sure. The poem plays with the concept of how a writer manipulates words. I was intrigued.

I finished the painting on Mom's plate tonight and Carola brought home eight little fish bowls to start whitewashing. I must admit that despite my earlier reservations and historically proven lack of skill, my artwork isn't too shabby.

Friday, April 30th

Grade cards came out today and I averaged a 6.6. Yippee! That's pretty good for Chileans in general and especially for a gringa.

Jen and I had lunch at Nicole's because it was my last chance to see her before I leave, and Jen benefited from the leftover loot that was coming out of her closet: Cookies, taco seasoning, barbecue sauce, candles, lotion... It all went into a bag destined for Jen’s stash. My mind boggled to think that I’ll be doing the same thing in just two weeks.

Next we headed to Coco’s house to make chocolate chip cookies. The typical Chilean oven was a nightmare of inconsistency. One tray I left in for twenty minutes without toasting a bit and the next burned in barely five. I have to flip the cookies to avoid black bottoms and crude tops, but all things considered, it was a big success. Jen's dinner, and most likely Coco’s as well, consisted of two cookies (fresh from the oven) from each of the five batches and a few dough balls as entrées. I stole a carrot from the frig to keep my health nut reputation and then munched on cookies.

In the meantime, we watched “Mary Poppins” and cracked up, snuggling on the couch under our blankets
because the Chilean chill has started once again. We danced in the firelight and Alé amused us all with letters that she had written in English. Her choice of words was just so sweet and un-American that we couldn't help but laugh.

Saturday, May 1st

Chilean Family Vacation!

Jen and I rode with Buvi to Pucon in the pouring rain. I had to sit in the back because knitting is too dangerous for front seat passengers, but I finished a nice chunk of Mom’s scarf in the seven hour trip. We had sandwiches for lunch and I had to laugh because Carola had taken orders in the morning and yet the boys still ate our sandwiches instead of theirs. Then I fell asleep until the back tire blew and sent me flying.

The hotel is gorgeous. We ended up on the fourth floor with six bedrooms for eight people and no elevator because Teco refused to stay in the room originally reserved for us because it had bunk beds. Jen and I got the best view as the sun set over the lake, and then we set off to explore the pool, squash courts, video game room, and hotel lobby.

I tried to take another nap until Maxi pounded on the door and turned on the light. I gave up, ate dinner, and went to the comedy show put on by the staff. Later, Jen and I met the cast and chatted in the bar while the guys bet away half their salary. We laughed a lot at the “sexy” dancer, a guy trying to show the girls how it was done. Luckily, Rotary rules prohibit going out and getting smashed with strangers, so Jen and I had an easy way out.

I love Pucon. It's definitely the kind of place I could honeymoon in, and of all the crazy things, I wanted to share it with Mike. We’re not even going out!

Sunday, May 2nd

I slept in until 10am and still woke up exhausted with a “lack of sleep” headache. Carola, Buvi, and I went to misa, and they actually had hymnals to sing along with. I left before communion which I can’t participate in anyway to attend a merengue lesson, but got bamboozled by a flower seller in the street. I decided I wanted to buy some of his wooden flowers for extra cheerful gifts, but by the time I finished, I had an armload of bouquets and ten less luka in my wallet. The guy was good. He claimed to be the son of the flower shop owner and sold me a bundle for twice the price while pretending to cut me a deal. He even had Teco fooled by his magic tricks.

My late entrance received a weak reprimand, but I loved the merengue class. Victor, the Mexican with Maori tattoos, was the instructor and he chose me as his partner. Despite the tongue ring, tattoos, and numerous other piercings, he’s really nice and I like him. It also helps that for the first time in Chile, I feel pretty and appreciated. I can see in the way he watches me that he likes what he sees. I'm ready to be accepted again instead of perpetually too skinny or too fat, depending on the day. Later, he, Jen, Francisco the Brazilian, and I played 21 with the basketball. I was definitely the worst player, but I held my own. We’re pretty sure that Francisco had a little stalker blood in him as he kept an eye on both of us all day.

We took bikes out as a family excursion, but we struggled through the sand on the beach. I also donned my swim suit to use the heated pool, went Mother's Day shopping with the boys, lost at Nertz, and knitted two more inches of Mom’s scarf. It’s taking forever to finish. Talk about a labor of love.

Poor Jen was reminded a lot of New Zealand and missing her dad's birthday. She also has to watch her diet with as little gluten as possible until her medicine arrives to fight ulcers. With all the bread and pasta in Chile, it's a bit difficult.
Monday, May 3rd

The adventure to the volcano was a very unpredictable road trip. Teco drove, which pretty much explains things. We were driving cross country following a jeep in our poor beat-up station wagon. The car got well bumped about and we had to trek a bit as a family friend pulled the station wagon up the roughest part of the volcanic rock track with their SUV.

The wind was ferocious and sounded like thunder shaking the apartment. The lake had enough whitecaps to imitate the ocean and the news confirmed that the tremor I felt last night was real after all, a five pointer.

I had to shake my head and remind myself that I'd be back in Ohio in two weeks as Teco “shared” the housework. Naturally, without a nana we all have to take turns, but he has yet to lift a finger and never will. I don't mind the cleaning and do much more than my share, all the dishes thus far, but he still sends me in to replace Carola in the odd moment that I'm not already there and my hackles rise up at the hint of reproof in his tone. I also cringed as he started imagining their trip to Argentina tomorrow without kids since he has free gringa babysitters. I'll understand if Jen's paperwork doesn't qualify and keeps us from making the trip, but he's way too satisfied with leaving us behind for my liking.

Claudia, the daughter of the family friend that helped pull us up the volcano, joined me in bumping a volleyball around the gym until we met Felipe, another recreational staff member, and then we got everyone involved in dodge ball, kick ball, and 21. My basketball skills are improving in leaps and bounds, but considering where I started, I guess that’s not saying much.

Jen has decided that the GO guys have placed bets as to who can get me first. The greeting kisses have progressed from cheek to cheek to actual kisses on the cheek and there is a lot of shoulder rubbing and bumping going on. I even got to act in the comedy show as they picked me out of the crowd to do a role play of a drunk Maria. According to Jen, I was a smash, and even had the cast rolling. My performance also earned me half an hour in the Jacuzzi with a buddy, which will definitely not be Victor, Felipe, or Francisco!

The boys are adorable. Maxi was walking emotion as he played bingo and then won. Later, they kept knocking on the door only to disappear. Finally, I crept out to search for them, skillfully ignoring the double shadows slipping into my room and under my covers. The squeals of laughter started as Jen and I planned to jump on the bed. The next phase was a walkie-talkie under the bed, stealthily delivered by Jen, that admitted ghost noises. Another stunning acting job on my part made their night as I pretended to freak out, hiding under the covers, shrieking and whimpering at all the right moments. Then they attacked me with toothbrushes!

Tuesday, May 4th

Teco woke me up at 8am to say that Jen and I were staying home, but Carola was sorry to leave us and Buvi promised us chocolate from Argentina. When they came home for dinner, we discovered that we could've gone after all. We just couldn't have
come back! Carola also brought us back ear warmers that will be perfect for jogging on a cold and windy day.

The boys and Jen slept in until 11 am and so I used the time to finish my senior pictures and a thank you note to Rotary before heading off to my merengue class. Afterwards, I joined water aerobics and everyone was calling me Maria based on last night's performance. I started off playing ball with a bunch of old people in the pool and was reminded that youth is more attitude than age. When Felipe arrived, we really had a workout and I had to work to keep up.

After a leftover taco lunch, we borrowed bikes to cycle with the boys and ended up tossing old bread to the biggest ducks that Jen has ever seen. We played cards and basketball too until the cute little boys had caused a cute little headache and I had to take an hour break from all the family fun and excitement.

The Caribbean show was the best yet with lots of tropical dancing. Felipe either had dance lessons as a child or has a natural flair, and the Chilean culture shone through the colorful lack of costuming. Jen and I had special recognition once again.

Wednesday, May 5th

Mambo was a great workout that wore out my arms without my knowledge. After an hour of “Mambo #5,” the easy aqua aerobics lesson wasn’t so easy.

I explored the gorgeous golf green with Carola and Buvi. We gazed across the wooded lawns, enjoying the view of the mountain and the lake, and chatting away where we'd plopped in the grass. Carola was telling me about the rare copihue plant that she refuses to buy in the streets because it's endangered, when Teco brought me a bouquet of copihue that he picked from the trees. We also discuss my boyfriend and marriage possibilities upon returning to the States. Carola remarked slyly that I could bring Mike with me the next time I came to visit so she can give her approval to my novio.

At 7 pm, we decided to visit Las termas de San Luis. The warm mineral water was relaxing and I amazed Gundi by spinning ten underwater flips and holding my breath for over a minute. The show tonight was “name that movie” based on a popular song and I managed to answer two of the seven I recognized.

Panqueques con manjar son exquisitos!

Thursday, May 6th

I bought eight chocolate manjar filled, chocolate volcanoes as a reminder of the sweet tooth of Chile before my salsa/mambo class. Then I stuck around for more aqua aerobics. Felipe was in a flirtatious mood.

Buvi and Tata left early, taking my wooden flowers with them. I don't want my presents to break or Carola’s gift to be discovered on the seven hour return trip.

Teco called me a lizard as I stretched out on the floor in front of the window to bask in the sun after lunch and read some Chocolate Caliente. The wind died down to the point that I stripped to a tank top during our pontoon boat ride. The water was so clear that I saw a fish swimming below like a glass topped aquarium. Later, we piled in the car to visit Los Ojos de Cabulga, a collection of cascades with the bluest water I've ever seen without the help of food coloring. Vines of copihue dotted the wooded path, and I had to ponder in amazement at the abundance of the plant I've been searching for all year long. Poor Jen ran straight into a barbed wire fence and scratched up her face. Today just wasn't her day. Her stomach was also acting up as a result of some
mysterious gluten that she ate yesterday, we’re boggled as to what, and it will take another few weeks for her mom to send the homeopathy over from New Zealand. Having her system out of whack has its side effects too and we had to have a serious conversation about her behavior. First, we talked about how she’s “subconsciously” avoiding the family, even to say good morning. Then we discussed her rebellion against Chilean portions which evoked recollections of my own problem. Finally, we touched on the issue of crowding. She doesn’t dare leave my ring of protection when the family is around and therefore stands in the mini kitchen blocking all progress while I’m helping or decides to wash dishes while we’re still working on coffee and dessert which complicates things even more. We managed to break both a cup and a chili pepper dish, and then I left her to do her thing while I played lizard.

Carola bought us wooden medallion earrings and wanted to take pictures. I think she’s starting to miss me and the feeling is nice.

Friday, May 7th

I got what I deserved when I asked Francisco to show me what salsa is really like after my morning dance class. I may have a natural feel for dance, but I still have a lot to learn. My feet switched to lefts as he spun, twirled, and danced circles around me. It was amazing. I loved it and I’m determined to find some dance classes in Ohio. Francisco’s eyes also lit up at the thought of teaching in the US.

I started out the morning by hiking up the golf course to videotape the view of the volcano for my family. Then the girls went craft shopping. Jen bought wool to learn to knit, Carola found a plethora of platters, and I bargained for souvenir Chile mugs for Mom’s morning coffee.

Lunch ended at five o’clock. We munched all afternoon on shellfish, nuts, ham, cheese, etc., and I insisted on finishing the dishes before going off to play volleyball. Jen was ready to escape halfway through, but she won’t go without me so there were no rude gringas in Pucon today.

I witnessed my first beer drinking contest after the show and did some more dancing. Juan Carlos showed me up as much as Francisco and I had to give myself a timeout to catch my breath.

Saturday, May 8th

A day of travel. I took advantage of my last chance to swim and arrived at the pool at 9am, long before the staff showed up. Luckily, a Mr. Fix-it let me in and complemented my Spanish by confusing me for a Brazilian.

We left all the unused food in the fridge for the hotel nanas. I will never get used to that part of Chile. Instead of using the cooler, Carola pitched two tubs of ice cream, chicken, turkey, beef, veggies, condiments, and two bottles of yogurt. This may be some Chilean of a tip, but I certainly wouldn’t feel comfortable eating somebody else’s discarded leftovers.

We left at noon and got back to Curicó around 9pm with a three hour stop to visit Teco’s niece. Gundi almost scared me to death as he showed off his trampoline flipping skills, right over the edge.

The excess of sweets this week is beginning to take its toll. My stomach doesn’t even pretend to feel hungry at the moment.

Sunday, May 9th

A good night sleep left me well refreshed for Mother’s Day preparations. I started out making orange cranberry scones and had to fight the Chilean oven for good results. Thirty-five minutes later (the recipe only called for twelve), my pastries were golden brown and quite tasty. Meanwhile, I set up Carola’s card and flowers next to a pre-set breakfast tray, and then retreated to my room to work on Pucon pictures. She knocked and came in to thank me and you could see in her eyes that she was touched by my card and my gift. When I went back in the kitchen, I found that Carola and Teco had eaten six scones between them. Another culinary success!

After mass, we had lunch with Carola’s side of the family at the Hotel Turismo and the meal lasted three hours! The chicken and the risotto rice were yummy and the dessert buffet was very nice.
tempting, but my tummy still said no sweets. From there we
headed straight to the campo just in time for once. Luckily, we
didn't have to eat.

I finished Mom's platters and started on the fishbowls. Carola
insisted that I sign my name to them. At least I don't have to be
ashamed. Carola even gave me the fishbowl that she painted and I
love it.

I started a 10-day countdown schedule. Today alone, I was
invited to two dinners, a lunch, and a goodbye party. I still have to
fit in a Santiago trip, a volleyball sendoff, an exchange student
once, and put the polishing touches on all my going away presents.
Let alone pack! School work definitely got knocked down a level
on the priorities list.

Monday, May 10th
It's just as well that I decided to skip a few classes this week
because school today was as boring as can be. Jen and I had lunch
with a local couple and ended up missing gym class. Jen was
anything but disappointed.

I spent all afternoon painting my fishbowls and almost
finished. Carola is being a dear with all the extra help she’s giving
me.

We practiced volleyball in sweatpants and sweatshirts,
watching our breath crystallize as we waited our turn. I ran home
ten minutes early to shower before heading over to Maca’s for a
goodbye dinner. I would have been on time, Maca was joking with
the early arrivals that I'd ring the doorbell at 8pm on the dot, but
Teco and Carola aren't that punctual and we went together. Maca
made me a hair towel on her embroidery machine that says
“Chelita.” There's the proof that she's upper-class Chilean. Not
only can she not say my name with the “sh” sound, she can’t spell
it either.

Tuesday, May 11th
I skipped the Niebla test (I hadn't had time to read it anyway)
and spent an extra hour and a half working on the scrapbook.

Sticking to the whole truth, I didn't have time to read the novel and
enjoy myself in Pucon so I decided to take advantage of my last
week without responsibility.

I arrived just in time for volleyball pictures. We took a whole
group shot, separated the big girls from the little ones, and then I
had a cameo performance. The girls invited me to an official
volleyball asado at Negra's house. It was a great success, although
quite chilly. I got lots and lots of hugs and they gave me a framed
picture of the team with names and comments on the back. While I
was there, I started handing out Rotary cards right and left. The
eager hands didn't seem to have an end. It was really touching to
see my Chilean friends begin to realize that I have one week left.
Fran invited me to lunch tomorrow and I made a date with the 4ºB
girls to visit Completito my last day. They all wanted to write me a
message in my journal and it seems that I have a lot to read on the
plane.

I finished the easier fishbowls and have to say they look pretty
iffy. Carola claims that they will turn out, but I can see that even
she had doubts.

Wednesday, May 12th
I took in my translated recipe collection to make photocopies
at school and then got bored and industrious. Using Jen’s colored
pencils, I colorfully colored all the pages with childish designs.
Not too shabby for my artistic ability. My classmates were passing
around my book to sign and we had a lot of laughs as Jen and
Andres had an English/Spanish conversation, each botching their
foreign language with style. I cracked up as Jen asked Andres if he
was a carrot, purposefully in English. He had just asked if she was
a cowboy, or her boyfriend, or her dog. Let's just say the verbs and
vocabulary were a little shaky.

Coco asked me to explain chemistry to her, so I tutored for an
hour after school: forty-five minutes of science and fifteen of
tricky geometric triangles.

I squeezed in a volleyball practice and a painting session
before heading off to Rotary. Kristin made me cry with her speech.
She remembered all the way back to our first meeting in the airpor
and mentioned things like “Whenever we didn't know the answer to something, we called Shelly,” and “We can't list all the things she's done for us because it makes us look bad.” Teco said he cried more than I did, but I can't be sure.

Thursday, May 13th

_Flojera!_ I skipped school again in the morning. I had no urge to sit through French dissertations, a history review that I won't be tested on, or a chemistry test that I won't be around to see the results for so I ended up scratching things off my to-do list. The fishbowls were painted, and despite my reservations, they don’t look half bad. The geometrics were saved by redoing the border in black. The photos were loaded on CDs, the carrot cake baked, frosted, and beautified, Teco’s website created, Jen’s “can't play hockey in gym” excuse note written, and half the scrapbook completed. For being lazy, I think I kept myself fairly occupied. I had to cross the street to find a matching spring form to make a double-decker carrot creation and spent some time visiting with Lupe. My own _nana_ is lamenting my departure too. Tere asked Carola if she could work tomorrow night just so that she could be part of the goodbye party.

I drove to Santiago with Tatan, Pilar, and Buvi so that I could visit Pablo and Isabel for a few days. We started off in Parque Arauco where I bought a book on Chile for Grandpa. It was $50, and I was rather hesitant to spend so much money, but it's what I wanted so I splurged. I was half hoping that he’d pass it on after a look over, but that won’t be necessary. When I made my choice, Buvi asked me, “Are you sure that's what you want?” I assured her that it was and she broke into a huge smile. “Good, because that's the one I bought you!” I was touched.

I managed to find Katie's chili T-shirt and a Chilean flag for Dad before sitting down with Isabel for a banana milk and half a piece of ricotta kuchen, all presents accounted for and very few pesos left in my pocket.

For dinner we went to the River Walk and tried Japanese cuisine. They went for sushi while I played it safe with the veggie seafood stir-fry followed by a _Puerto Varas_ cake split three ways. They do eat well here in Santiago! I had to make all the decisions throughout day, but Pablo and Isabel are great hosts. They even had a signed and dedicated picture waiting for me as a gift.

Friday, May 14th

I slept like a baby, nice and toasty, until 8:30 in the comfy apartment. It was wonderful! I got to try toasted pita bread, it doesn't brown or crisp, just pops up in a warm perfect _palta_ pocket. Next I checked email to discover that Mrs. Akenhead wants me to visit her fourth grade class and talk about my experience in Chile. I'm planning to bring in manjar for the kids to try and one peso a piece as a present. I finished Mom’s scarf today, which is definitely a six footer. Isabel and I visited an outdoor/patio style mall and several other shopping centers looking for egg cups and napkin holders. Once again, she got the munchies and we stopped for a snack at Starbucks. My chai tea was good even in the heat of the sun. The weather was fantastic and all I had with me was a sweater.

My _despidida_ was hysterical. I arrived home around 6:30 and was told that I'd do best to “throw myself to the chickens” and get out of the way so I went jogging. Jen was floating on clouds. She missed me after only one day and babbled on about the successes she had achieved, but I had to laugh at a typical Jen-ism. She went to bed early and Gundi didn't know where she was. He checked her room and thought it was empty so he told Carola that Jen was gone. They checked the room again and started to fret, but Carola tried the light switch and found her missing _gringa_. It's just crazy that Jen listened to the whole fiasco without once daring to say, “No, it's okay. I'm here.”

The _nanas_ outdid themselves with the spinach pie, peanut carrot cole slaw, rice with _palta_, mushroom turkey, lots of snacky things, and a yummy prune and manjar cake that went well with my carrot creation. I had many compliments. The living room was bursting with guests as all my aunts and uncles as well as a few family friends made an appearance to say goodbye to the _gringa_.

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Saturday, May 15th

The suitcases are packed and I'm beat. I worked all morning organizing my things into “to go” or “not to go” piles and tucked and rolled until 9 am or 10am-ish. Maca was kind enough to lend me her scale and one suitcase weighed in 1 kg under the limit and the other has 4 kg to play with. My carry-on doesn't look too bad, but I think I may have to swap a bit more before Wednesday.

Carola made me an “Alpeter’s Family” water pitcher as a parting gift, and the English glitch makes it that much more special.

We lost every set of the volleyball tournament today, but it was fun to play. I did very well despite the goosebumps. One picky ref was upset that my blue shorts were a shade lighter than the others, but Ricardo said they were going to kick me out of the country in a few days anyway and Silvana lent me her extra spandex pair so the crisis was averted.

Sunday, May 16th

We went fishing today at Lago Rapel, but it was a strange kind of fishing. They put two hooks on the same line and wait for a little silver perch like fish to catch itself. If they do actually catch one, they break the little neck and throw it on the bottom of the boat. Unfortunately, the day was cloudy and chilly, and the water had dropped ten feet and was slimy green due to the run off from a local pig farm. Even if we had caught a feast's worth, we couldn't have eaten our pejereyes. We fished off the shore for the most part because the normal barges were stuck high and dry in the mud, but at one point Jen and I went out in a row boat with Pablo. I set my pole aside with the thought that “if you can't eat your catch, why bother?”, propped my feet up on the side, and fell asleep wrapped up in my five layers of clothes.

It was funny to see the machismo in Chilean fishing too. I amazed my Tío Herminio by baiting my own hook and then left him flabbergasted as I cast my own line into the lake. Most Chileans can't do that, especially the girls. They actually hire a "fishing nana" to take care of baiting hooks, taking off fish, fixing tangles, and casting lines! The positive side effect of our trip, besides my nap, was the discovery of really good, fresh, and warm pan amasado. I had two pieces and half an empanada for lunch.

Monday, May 17th

I finished grandma's bowl while Jen and the boys headed off to school. I was supposed to finish last night, but when Carola told me to do the leaves and she'd be back in two minutes, I didn't think I'd still be waiting two hours later.

I also checked e-mail. Laura gave me strict instructions to call her the minute I got home. She wanted me to ride up to ONU and pick her up with her mom, but since we both get home on Thursday, that really won't work. Dad told me not to forget to get on the plane on Wednesday. As if I'd forget. Just two more days!

Carola outdid herself. She knitted me a sweater that’s warm, soft, and a deep dusky red. Maxi said that she was making it for Caro and it turned out to be too small, but I don't believe it. She's too good for that. Gundi was the model for judging size. She also had a fleece pullover embroidered for me.

Tuesday, May 18th

I go home tomorrow, and it just hit me. Tomorrow! My class threw me a goodbye party and of course, I had to be difficult and plan on not coming to school. Luckily, Jen was sneaky and said that we had to take an exchange student picture at noon. I went in jeans because the button had popped on my blue pants, but no one minded that I was out of uniform. Madame Ruminot gave me a collection of Pablo Neruda poems, Señor Pardo chose a history of the Conquista de Peru, and Jen baked New Zealand sugar cookies. She was up and about early, but I didn't catch on even though I had seen the recipe book out on the counter the night before. My goal was to sleep in so I ignored the activity and stayed in bed. I had to smile as she asked the boys if they wanted milk, after all the times that she's haggled me that they can do it themselves.

The 4°B girls all failed to prepare their homework ahead of time so our lunch was canceled. Jen and I laminated the scrapbook
in the center with a sticker shock $15, but it looks sharp and will last as long as the sweet memories. Jen also “shouted” me an ice cream cone, meaning she paid for the special treat.

The gringas came over for once and we chatted until 11pm. I was falling asleep while Kristin gave me a handy scalp massage, and random presents kept arriving for me until I began to dread the thought of rearranging my suitcases again. Maria Elena’s wicker basket is beautiful but where do you put it? I also received another sweater, a candle, a photo album, more earrings, and several books. Ay yay yay! Never have such wonderful presents presented such a problem.

I gave Gundi his last hug since he leaves for a field trip in the morning and won’t be accompanying me to the airport.

Wednesday, May 19th

Today was bittersweet. Leaving the scrapbook I had made and a pile of American chocolate with a goodbye note on the bed, I closed the door on my Chilean room for the last time. The nanas were sure to find my goodbye presents after I left.

We packed my suitcases in the car and drove to Santiago in a gloomy drizzle. Teco said that the skies were crying because they were going to miss seeing me in Chile. He wasn’t in a hurry either. For the first time since I had arrived in Chile, he wasn’t speeding along the highway.

When we got to the airport, no one knew what to do or say. Teco helped me check my baggage in with the airline and pick up my boarding pass, but we weren’t ready for goodbye. We walked up to the food court, found a table, and sipped on drinks, but a strained silence dominated the atmosphere. Finally, I decided that it was time for me to go. I gave Carola and Teco a last hug and made myself walk past security and through the gate. I never thought it would be so hard. I never thought that I could come to love another family so much in nine months.

Thursday, May 20th

Home again.

It was a long ride. In Miami, I had to go through customs and security. Since the plane had flown out of South America, the security personnel were equipped to ask questions in both English and Spanish. Ironically, they assumed that I was Chilean and I didn’t see any reason to correct them. My Spanish was passable and I just wanted to get through. Unfortunately, the guy behind me was an obvious gringo and the security guys felt free to include me in their gringo jokes.

Getting off the plane, I hardly recognized my family. They were the same and yet different from what I remembered. My dad was grayer, my sister taller, my mother shorter, but the hugs were the same. It just took me a moment to recall that in America we don’t give besos in greeting, just hugs.

On the ride home, it felt like I was seeing the familiar landscape for the first time. I was so used to the Chilean mountains in the background, the Chilean houses, the Chilean billboards. We stopped at a restaurant for dinner and I caught myself saying gracias to the waiter and expecting to find palta or empanadas on the menu. My family chattered away and I stumbled a few times on English phrasing. I was home and yet I felt like a fish out of water.

Over the next few weeks, I would discover that the fish bowl analogy was an apt description. I’d find my family watching me at odd moments like they didn’t know me, like they didn’t know what to do with me. All of a sudden, the family had four members again and they weren’t sure how to react. Even my dog seemed to hold back and she no longer slept at the foot of my bed, but the strangest part about returning home was how my friends and family treated my time abroad. In no time at all, it was as if I had never left. I had an experience of a lifetime to share, and yet nobody really wanted to listen. To them, it was too abstract. They didn’t understand.

In time, I learned to adjust, to tell the short amusing anecdotes. I’d tell them about my nana and how I fought to make my own bed. I’d tell them about my trips to Patagonia with the penguins and the glaciers. I’d tell them about the empanadas and the pan
amasado. I’d tell them about my peanut butter withdrawals. I’d tell them about the weather.

What I couldn’t tell them was how much I’d changed, how much this experience had made me think. For nine months, I had lived with another family, in another culture with different foods, customs, traditions, and beliefs. Before going to Chile, I had never really stepped outside of my comfort zone. In high school, most of my friends were conservative and protestant, but in Chile, I had to answer some tough questions. Most of my friends were Catholic with a Catholicism that had been infused with native paganism. I had to question my own beliefs and defend them.

I also had to think long and hard about the social and gender discrimination that occurs in Chile. I had read about nadas before, but the sharp distinction between the upper and lower social classes staggered my mind, and I wasn’t prepared to deal with my new status as one of the social elite. My American family had taught me to pitch in and clean up after myself. It felt wrong to expect someone else to do my work for me, but it wasn’t my place to criticize my host family, let alone the Chilean way of life. I tried my best to befriend the nadas, but even they were adamant about retaining the social order. Sigh.

I also wasn’t used to being objectified and treated differently because I was female. All of a sudden, I was being told that I couldn’t handle doing things that I had been doing all my life. Not only was I excluded from climbing a volcano, but I wasn’t even supposed to do push-ups lest I hurt myself. I’m not sure, but I’d also bet that the intense male chauvinism also plays a role in the obsession with body image, diuretics, and dieting.

Yet despite my grumblings about a few social and political foibles that grate a personal nerve, I still maintain that studying abroad in Chile is one of the best choices I will ever make in my lifetime. In those nine months, I fell in love with the Chilean culture and the Chilean people. I learned to think about life from a new perspective and while I may find fault with a few Chilean practices, I can also judge my own country more objectively. The United States is hardly perfect.

People are people all over the world. We all have faults and foibles, but we also have strengths and virtues. I feel so blessed for having shared a year of my life with my host family, with the other exchange students, with the Rotary clubs of Curicó and Santiago, and with my schoolmates. We laughed together, cried together, traveled together, and learned together. They gave me a gift of their time and of their presence. I will forever be grateful.

When I remember Chile, I remember the warmth of a family gathered all afternoon to enjoy an asado. I remember the sunset on the snow-capped mountains and my jogs through a rose garden. I remember a cell phone with a message from my host brother and a Christmas morning spent by the pool. I remember frigid evenings spent reading by the stove and the hours Carola spent teaching me to knit. I remember the first empanada I ever tasted and the tea parties with palta and banana milk. I remember a clown who stole my heart for an evening and the thrill of dancing cueca beneath a star filled sky. I remember the international feasts that we shared and a refreshing swim surrounded by jellyfish. I remember the welcoming hug that engulfed me at the airport and the tears in my host family’s eyes as we said good bye. I have so many good memories of that year. Memories that I hope never to forget.

I would never say that studying abroad is easy. It has it’s share of joy and heartache, but I will say, without a glimmer of a shadow of a doubt, that it’s worth it.
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Appendix C
Dictionary of Spanish Words and Phrases

Alfajores- two spice cookies sandwiched around manjar
Almuerzo- lunch
Amorosa- sweet
Araña- spider
Arroz y pollo- chicken and rice
Artesania- crafts
Asado- Chilean barbeque
Ascroso olor- awful odor
Atun- tuna
Ave- bird

Baile entretenido- aerobics
Bajito- shorty
Bandejas- TV trays
Base- base
Bautizmo- baptism
Bellas artes- fine arts
Beso- a kiss, typically to the cheek, used in greeting
Borotos granados- bean soup
Buenos dias- hello or good day
Bufanda- scarf

Calefactor- water heater
Camarones- shrimp
Campesinos- country folk
Campo- country
Campo galletas- rolls
Carabinero- Chilean police
Carnet- identification card
Casera- hand made
Castellano- Spanish
Castellano antigua- old Spanish
Centolla- crab
Chicha- very sweet wine
Chilenitos- manjar filled sandwich cookies covered in meringue

China- Chilean cowgirl
Chocolate caliente- hot chocolate
Chupe- casserole
Churrasco- roast beef sandwich
Churipan- spicy grilled sausage in a toasted bun
Churo- cool
Coleccion- goodie bag
Colectivo- a cross between a bus and a taxi
Comida- food or supper
Completo- a hot dog with mustard, ketchup, and palta
Conejo- rabbit
Congrio- Chilean fish
Copihue- the national flower of Chile
Cosas verdes- green things
Cueca- the Chilean national dance
Cuento del alma- story from the soul
Cuernos- horns
Cuerpo y sangre- the holy sacrament
Cueva- cave
Culetas al jugo- pork chops sautéed in their own juice
Curso- grade level

Deportista- athlete
Despedida- goodbye party
Discotec- dance hall

El lago de los cisnes- Swan Lake
Empanadas de pino- meat pasties
Empanadas de queso- cheese pasties
Ensalada- side dishes consisting of fresh or cooked vegetables
Escalopas- thin slices of fried, breaded meat
Español- Spanish
Espina- spine
Exicito- delicious

Feliz Cumpleaños- Happy Birthday
Feliz Navidad- Merry Christmas
Ferrocarriles- trams

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Fiesta- party
Flaca- skinny
Floja- lazy
Fondo- country retreat

Ganas- desire or urge
Gira- senior trip
Gorda- fat
Greda- black earth pottery
Gracias- thank you
Gringa- a female foreigner

Ganadería- ice cream store
Hijo- son
Hombres- men
Hospedaje- hostel or hotel
Huaso- Chilean cowboy

Ideonda- smelly
Iglesia- church
Intercambios- exchange students

Jefa- leader

Lago- lake
Lancha- speedboat
Leche- milk
Leche ideal- evaporated milk
Licenciatura- graduation
Llega- arrive
Loca- crazy
Locos- shellfish
Lomita- sandwiches heaped with thinly sliced pork
Lonka- leader of the mapuche indians
Lo que me gusta a mi- what I like
Lucuma- a Chilean ice cream flavor that tastes like a cross between caramel and nuts
Luka- 1000 Chilean pesos

Machas- mussels
Machismo- male chauvinism
Machos- manly men (a popular Chilean sitcom)
Manjar- Chilean carmel
Manta- a heavy covering similar to the Mexican poncho
Manzanas- apples
Mercado- market
Merluza- Chilean fish
Mierda- taxi
Miel de melon- melon honey
Miladon- ancient beast that once lived in Chile
Misa- Catholic mass
Modismos- cultural expressions that are not easily translated
Monedera- change purse
Mote- wheat berries
Mote de durazno- a dessert made with wheat berries and peaches
Muchachos- boys
Muerte de risas- dying of laughter
Museo- museum
Muy rapida- very quickly

Nana- a lower class woman who helps with the house work
Niños- children
Novio- fiancé or boy friend

Once- afternoon snack

Palta- mashed avocado served as a condiment
Pan amasado- kneaded bread
Pan budin- bread pudding
Pan de pascua- Fruit cake Panqueques- pancakes and/or crepes
Pañuela- handkerchief
 Pareces mas gordita que la ultima vez que te vi- you look fatter than the last time I saw you
Parilla- a small grill that cooks on the table
Paseo- walk or tour
Pastel- pastries
Pejereyes- fish
Pelao- baldy
Penguinera- penguin reserve
Permiso- permission
Pesada- no fun, stick in the mud
Pi de limon- lemon meringue pie
Piedra iglesia- stone church
Pisco- strong Chilean alcohol
Piscocola- pisco mixed with coca cola
Piscosour- pisco mixed with lemon
Plata- money
Platano- banana
Playa- beach
Playa de los gringos- Foreigners’ beach
Plaza- the town center
Pololo- boy friend
Postre- dessert
Prendeme- turn me on
Pure- blend
Pure de manzanas- apple sauce
Pure de papas- mashed potatoes
Que fome!- How boring!
Queso- cheese

Ramadas- a leafy pavillion erected during the national holiday
Recreo- recess
Reunion- meeting

Salar- salt flat
Salmonera- salmon farm
Salsipicon- a salad made with leftovers
Senor- gentleman or Mr.
Sí- yes
Siesta- nap
Simpatica- kind
Sopapillas- fried pumpkin donuts

Teatro municipal- city theater
Te encuentro gorda- I think you look fat
Te felicito- congratulations
Telefericos- gondolas
Te quiero- I love you
Terma- thermal pool
Te ve muy linda en este bikini- you look very nice in this bikini
Tia- aunt
Tiendas- shops
Tio- uncle
Toma- when the senior class takes over the school
Torres- towers
Torta- cake
Torta de mil hojas- thousand layer cake (made with thin wafers, manjar, whipped cream and/or custard)
Trampozo- cheater

Un poquito- a little
Uvas rosadas- pink grapes

Vindimia- grape harvest

Zanahorias- carrots
Zapallitos- zucchinis