

NEWS FROM OUR OUTBOUNDS – DECEMBER 2007



KATELYNN WILEY
11/13/07
IN CHILE

Hello USA!!! I decided it's way past time for me to send back. So, here I go... For the last month and a half I have been trying with difficulty to push my way slightly farther into Chilean life. I have done nothing but eat, sleep, and think adaptation since I got here and, I'm happy to say, it seems to finally be paying off.

I now have a steady group of friends at school. They are giggly, loud, and entirely different from anyone I would normally find myself with in the United States, but I'm not in the United States, I'm in Chile and I am entirely satisfied with these kids. One thing I have really come to notice more and more about them though is how different they all are. Chilean high school is a lot like American elementary school. They stick you in a single classroom with a specific group of kids and they keep you with those kids for a whole year (or in Chile's case, 4 years). The basic fact is that if you don't make friends with whoever is in your class, school is miserable. People here make friends with whoever they can. Therefore, in Chile, you'll find more close bonds between different types of people than you would in the USA. While in elementary school it creates a situation where small children are fighting over their differences, by high school I think it becomes a sort of practice at accepting others' individuality. Thank goodness because if they couldn't handle my American weirdness I would be quite lonely here.

I have also started to become more active. In a way I guess I am putting my life back together according to how Chile will allow me. While in Petaluma I usually went out to eat with friends or see a movie. Here, I'm broke. (Really, I never realized how many little things I relied on my parents for financially) Thus, cheaper entertainment is needed. I usually find myself with Marleen (The Holland exchange student) in the town center during afternoons or weekends when I'm not in school. We talk about school or rotary, shop for whatever we need, and look at expensive things that we can't buy. We almost always get ice cream at Via Lactia (The best ice cream place in Talca). If I'm really broke I'll buy a chocolate bar at a street stand or some 100 peso popcorn (that's less than 25 cents). Sometimes Marleen and I buy Churros. You can get a bag full for less than 50 cents. I really love Chile when I'm eating cheap churros... I have yet to buy the nuts although Meg (Another exchange student in my town) swears they are amazing. I don't know how they taste but looking at the English on the Nut stands just makes me laugh. The only correct one is "Lord of the nuts" and then there's "King the nuts", followed by my personal favorite, "Master the nuts" That's a bit off topic... but it gives a good example of Chilean English.

Another part of my life that I am regaining is sports. I recently bought running shoes and am excited to start running in the hills behind my house once school gets out(which is in about a month). The best thing though is that I have

gotten involved in swimming at my school every Saturday. I thought it was just practice, but today one of my swimming friends came up to me at school and said there was a competition Friday at 9am and that I could compete if I wanted to. I have only been twice, but I am not really worried. Chilean sports are rather un-intense. It turns out that I'm a pretty good swimmer here instead of simply average. Besides, I get to miss school if I compete ;P

I guess it's time I got to talking about my Spanish though. It has significantly improved to the point of conversation. I'm still waiting for that first Spanish dream, but I have a feeling I don't have to wait too much longer. I am certainly not fluent. Conversation doesn't mean fluency, although it would seem like it. However, when you talk with someone face to face the topic is usually relevant to your life and fairly easy to follow. I will consider myself fluent when I can actually stay awake during a Spanish explanation of trigonometry and understand what's going on in Lola (the best soap opera ever) with my eyes closed.

Hmm... as a side note I guess me having a favorite soap opera is another sign of adaptation. It's a neat show though! This guy named Lalo wakes up and he's a girl. And then he has to learn how to be a woman and the girl he was messing around with becomes his/her best friend.

And there are a lot of other little things that show I am fitting in better. I have picked up a lot of Chilean habits, for example. I feel exposed when sockless and never leave my room without something covering my feet. Chileans have somehow decided that feet are evil and if you walk around the house without socks someone will probably stop what they're doing to point at your feet in horror. Also, take a sip of my tea and you will be overwhelmed with sweetness. I used to take my tea absolutely sugarless, but now I put in 2 and a half to 3 heaping spoonfuls of sugar and I find tea bland without it. The same thing goes for salt. Everything must be smothered in salt. There is no seasoning but salt. Chileans (and now me) live for salt and will all die of sodium intake someday. I also mix everything on my plate. Chileans are devout believers in the phrase, "It all ends up in the same place" or they would be if they had ever heard that phrase. Since everything is seasoned the same, everything can be clumped together. You get things like rice, tuna, tomato, spinach, egg, and lemon salad. Which hey... now that I think of it sounds like a normal salad... but I've gotten used to salad being lettuce with lemon juice and salt and nothing else.

Ooo... while on the topic of eating... I can actually eat without dumping food on myself. Something that, yes, I should have been able to do at a much younger age, but I just had to learn a new way to eat. I can, effectively, eat with the fork in my left hand and my knife in my right and the Chileans have made me thoroughly embarrassed to touch plated food with my hands. And speaking of hands... I'm still working on remembering to keep them both above the table. It's rude to have them out of sight. Guys get a really hard time about it. hahaha.

In other news, I recently took another trip with rotary. A few weeks ago they told us that there was going to be a camping trip. I thought this sounded fun and decided to go. After we were all signed up with our names down in ink they told us that we were going to have to walk five hours with all of our gear. When we arrived they thought it was a good time to tell us that we were actually walking for 7 hours over a

mountain. The exchange students living in Rancagua weren't informed of any walking whatsoever. They had all packed their luxuries, were carrying huge sports bags, and had loose fitting street shoes on their feet. Well, it's unnecessary to say that we were all exhausted by the end of the day. It didn't help that hardly any of us were able to sleep. When we woke up in the morning, Rotary told us they had planned a day hike for us "Just for fun." Haha. We hiked for 4 hours to the top of a mountain and 3 back down. Well, my group didn't actually get to the top. We were quite slow and untrained and so Tio Ernesto told us we had to turn around when we made it to the Darwin Plaque. However, I was among the few people who even made it that far and I was very proud of myself at the end of the day.

I hope that's a sufficient update for now! I'll try no to be so long in writing next time. It just seems like every time I sit down to write home I get pulled away and if not, then I realize I'm not in the mood. Well, best wishes to everyone above the equator!!!



**BRITT CALDER
IN THAILAND
11/14/07**

Hello everybody! Sa -wat -dee kah, which is hello and goodbye in Thai.

I've been here for almost 3 and a half months now. It's crazy. I'm warning everyone now that this is probably going to be rather long, because I could go on for pages and pages about everything here in Thailand. I guess I'll just start off with some of the basic stuff.

I am getting fairly good at Thai, but I'm not fluent or anything yet. I can get around by myself and have conversations on limited subjects. I can understand more than I can speak too, so I feel like what I really need now is just more times to let it all just finish sinking in. But I feel fairly okay about how well I can speak at this point. And I'm learning to read and write, and I can actually read fairly well, I just don't know what it means a lot of the time. Writing is hard though, because I can't spell very well. One of the hardest parts of the language is the fact that it's a tonal language, so there are 5 tones that can totally change the meaning of the word, but at first I couldn't hear the difference at all. But now I can, and people tell me a lot that i speak clearly, which makes me happy. So I'm getting there. Occasionally I can't remember how to say things in English, and I can only say them in Thai, which is really strange.

It's hot. And humid. I'm not sure, but I believe it's generally around 85-90 degrees F and a lot of humidity (I really don't know how much). But it's basically such that you walk outside and start sweating, although now we're moving into the "cool" season, and people wear sweaters all the time, even though it's still about 80 degrees. I'm getting used to it though, and 75 F actually feels colder to me now. It was the rainy season, so it rained almost every day, but only for about an hour. Sometimes it'd just suddenly start absolutely pouring, and it got really windy, and I swear it was typhooning for 10 or 20 minutes, but then it'd just go away and get

sunny 5 minutes later. It's strange. But now it hardly ever rains, and I'm kinda sad about that.

Thai people are just as nice and friendly as I had heard they would be, and they all do just about anything to help me. Basically everyone I meet wants to talk to me because I'm foreign, but Thai people are shy to speak to foreigners, so it's interesting, although the other day I was in a 7/11 and a lady just came up to me and told me she wanted to be my friend because she loved English. That's kinda how it is. And basically anywhere I go people are always staring at me if I'm in my school uniform because they've never seen a foreigner (farang in Thai - I hear that word so often) in Thai uniform. But almost all Thai people are similar in one way - they all absolutely honor and respect their country, their king, and their religion (Buddhism, although there are some Christians and Muslims). Every day before school they sing the national anthem and raise the flag and bow to it, then they do Buddhist prayers (and the non-Buddhists would never dream of protesting this or saying that it was unfair). Everywhere you go there are pictures of the King, Buddhist altars, and they play the King's anthem and the national anthem all the time. Monday is the King's day and his color is yellow, and about 80% of the people wear yellow shirts every Monday, and those who don't it is generally because they are in uniform. I don't think the U.S. could be as united about anything, let alone something as controversial as a king. Youtube.com was banned in the entire country because there was a video on it that was disrespectful to the king. That's how much they care about all of this.

My first host family is super nice (it's hard to imagine Thai people that aren't). They live in a section of the city called Lat Phrao, which is kinda far away from the main downtown, but it's more of a residential area and their house is in a neighborhood-ish thing, meaning that it's all houses and not apartment buildings and whatnot. Their house was featured in a magazine 3 times, and it's only about 2 years old, so you can imagine that it's quite nice. They have one daughter, Obey, who is on exchange in Colorado this year, but I met her for about a week, and she calls her mom every morning from there. Both my host parents work for a Christian church called the Hope of Bangkok Church, and apparently it's the largest worldwide church there is, like there's Hope of Seattle Church, and Hope of London Church, etc. My host dad is the number 2 or 3 minister in all of the 6 churches and 75,000 members in Bangkok, so he's kind of a VIP if we're anywhere related to the church or with people from the church, which we generally are. This does make them awfully busy though and a lot of times I don't get home until about 9 or 10 at night, but I'd rather be busy than bored. I stayed with them for August and September.

For October I had a month school break for the midterm, so I stayed with my second host family because they live a long way from my school. the dad (I call him DD) was an exchange student to America and is married to a Japanese lady who only speaks Japanese and some English, and they have 2 little daughters who are extraordinarily lucky and speak Thai, Japanese, and English already. But it was interesting because I ended up learning bits of Japanese while I was there, which was extraordinarily confusing at first. They have a gorgeous house in this perfect little neighborhood, and I loved having little host sisters to play with

because they're adorable. I also got to go travelling a lot during my break, so my host dad took me to the very south of Thailand, a city called Hat Yai. I got to go to a rubber tree plantation, and plant rice, although I was attacked by leeches in the rice paddy. That freaked me out a bit, especially since no one warned me that that would happen. I also went to Ayutthya, which is the old capital and has lots of old, ruined temples because the Burmese came and burned them down at some point, and Thais are still fairly upset about that. But it was beautiful. My favorite place I went was Pattaya, which is a town on the beach. It was gorgeous beyond belief. I felt like I was in a commercial for a tropical vacation, which technically makes sense. But it had the white sand, palm trees, clear, warm water, and all that good stuff. Also a lot of old Russian mafia men in Speedos, but other than that it was awesome. So I really enjoyed my month off, and I got to be good friends with some of the other exchange students here, which is really nice to have other people to hang out with.

My other host family the dad is only home on the weekends (I haven't met him) but the mom (Bat) is the sister of my first host mom, and she has two daughters, Wawaa who is in university, and Wiwii who is 13. This is the house I am currently at, possibly until I get out of school in March because I really like it here, not that I didn't like the other 2 houses. The first week I was here Wawaa took me around to places in Bangkok, and Bat is super nice and likes to talk to me all the time, and feeds me all my favorite Thai meals. They live in a really nice condo (they have 2 other houses) with a pool and exercise room and it's near to my school, so everything's good there.

The food is delicious. And cheap. My first host mom doesn't cook, so we always are out at various places, which I really can't complain about. And Thai people like to eat all the time. They don't ask you "How are you?" they ask, "Have you eaten yet?" And then there are two categories of meals, noodles and rice. Rice generally consists of a plate of white rice with some various meat/vegetable dish on top that normally is a little spicy. If you go out to eat with several people than often they order several different rice toppings and each person has a plate of rice and eats a little bit of everything. Noodles are normally in a soup/broth with some vegetables and unspecified pieces of meat. I generally prefer rice dishes because the noodle ones scare me sometimes because the only two things I haven't liked here have been in soup/noodle dishes. The first is fish meatballs, because those are just random parts of random ocean dwelling creatures smushed together and cooked and I just can't eat them. The other is this soup that has dried fish stomach in it. The first time I had it I was too afraid to ask what it was so I just ate it despite the fact that it was making me feel sick, but I'm glad I didn't ask beforehand because I wouldn't have eaten it at all, though I never will again. Other than that everything is far too delicious. I LOVE LOVE LOVE the fruit here. There are just so many that we don't have in America and I will miss terribly. My favorites are guava, noynah, mangosteen, and sala.

School is kinda boring, because I don't have a whole lot of classes, but I have friends in my class and the classes I do have are fun ones. I have: badminton, Thai musical instrument, Thai cooking, Thai language, art, and some various Thai handicraft classes like fruit carving. I can now carve carrots and guava into roses. Heck yes. I'm not a huge fan of the uniform, because it's hot and uncomfortable, but

I'm getting over it. But a lot of people are really surprised when I tell them that in American we don't have uniforms.

Love you all, sorry it's been such a long time since some of you have heard from me, feel free to respond with any questions/comments/just to say hi. I'll get back to you as soon as I can.



ELENO NUNEZ
12/4/07
IN GERMANY

All right, first I want to say that I am sorry for being late...I forgot. All right time is just flying by I am not even kidding. I've entered my fifth month yesterday! And I am really liking it here. I am a little home sick now since its around Christmas but its not too bad. School, well school is school, it's boring but I really like the people there, they are nice really nice so it makes it worth going even though I am bored to death during double math Tuesdays! I just went on a trip to Berlin and it was so much fun and than when I was coming back home it was like "dude Eleno you were in Berlin" the whole "realizing where you are thing" it's finally getting me. I am excited for Christmas here. There is something call a Weihnachtmarkt and it seems to be cool! Really cool! All right so my German is coming along pretty good I can hold a good conversation but it's coming along good; every one tells me how they are amazed that I speak such good German, who knows. Friends are also coming so it seems like my life is falling into place a little by little it still hard sometimes. I am happy though even though I miss the California weather. You have no idea how sad it is to wake up at seven in the morning and it's dark....and raining. It rains all the time over here they don't even need a weather man they just know its going to rain! Anyways other than that its going good I am happy and it seems to be going good. Thanks Rotary Viele Grüße von Deutschland



KATELYNN WILEY
12/13/07
IN CHILE

All right. Now that I'm rounding on the halfway point of my 4th month, I feel it's time to send home the 4th Episode of this semi-exciting series! haha
Episode 3

To begin with, I will say that I have been in the country formally known as Chile for over 100 days now. The implications of this are hard to explain, only that I feel like I have been here forever and at the same time am shaking my head in amazement that this much time has passed already. Beyond that, there are no explanations for this weird mix of emotions I'm having towards time right now.

School remains boring, as always, but it's becoming a little more gratifying to be

there as my Spanish improves and I am able to participate. I got my first 7 the other day! (7=A) It was in history on a 2 minute presentation. I had to talk about the reasons leading up to the American Revolution. My Spanish was questionable and I could only fit a little bit of information into two minutes because I talk slow, so I am fairly sure that my 7 was for effort alone... but hey, I'll take it!

Yesterday I participated in an English "conference" between all of the schools with strong English programs. It was a time for all of the best students to make presentations in English; they could do anything: an act, a poem, a dialogue, a song, etc... Now, I say "conference" because it was much more like a competition.... one in which my teacher cheated a bit by using the United States exchange student. My group was the first to present because our school was hosting the event. Our dialogue was about a group of students at a literary club discussing nature's place in poetry, but eventually moved to Chilean poets VS American poets. The skit ended with me saying "Wow, Chilean Poets are better!" All Liceo Abate Molina participants got an automatic 7 on the final test of the year, even me... who the professor had sent out of the class room in fear that I would help the other students cheat (which I definitely would NOT have done).

Other updates. Well, this was a while ago but I won two medals in my swimming competition: 1st place in the 60 free and 3rd in the 100 free. Sadly, swimming has finished for the season. Feeling in need of a physical activity, I am considering joining my good friend Marleen in her ballet class until swim season starts up again.

Spanish! I have been having on and off days lately. Yesterday, my Spanish was in a terrible slump but today I managed to have several effective conversations without tripping on my sounds or realizing mid-sentence that I had no idea how to say something. I have; however, regrettably hit a stopping point in my rapid improvement. It reminds me of the beginning of track season when everybody is a little bit out of shape. Everybody makes huge leaps in the first few weeks, cutting off whole minutes from their times. However, after about a month and a half, everybody is working like crazy just to knock off a second or two. That's what it's like now. I think until my brain shuts down just so I can realize at the end of the day that I only learned one new word. Today I learned how to say bleeding :D... but I forgot it. :(

Going back to school, I forgot to mention that... TOMORROW IS MY LAST DAY!!! Hooray! Summer is almost here (again)! There is actually one more week left, but I have a Rotary trip to the south, which I am quite excited for. One of the first things I was told by the Rebounds when I found out I was going to Chile is, "Go on the trip to the south!" So I took their advice and I'm all signed up. The only disappointing thing is that I will be missing my class trip to... well... I don't know where they're going. It's something I can't pronounce and don't understand but I remember that it starts with a D. haha. The place is not important though. It just would have been fun to spend some time with my classmates.

I am having trouble thinking of other things I could say. I guess everything seems normal now and not much feels exciting enough to send back home. Maybe that is a good point though. Everything is becoming natural. When I wake up in the morning, I am waking up at home now, not in my host house. I am going to my school and talking with my friends. I have my favorite things to do in time and my

favorite places to eat. I was even mistaken for a Chilean the other day. Because only about 1 in 500 Chileans are as blond as I am, I've decided that I must have looked comfortable with my surroundings. Things I would have looked twice at during my first month I don't even think about. Horse carts in the street, a pack of stray dogs herding a car, chickens running loose on the sidewalk... I hardly even notice it anymore.

Anyways, Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah, and a Wonderful New Year! I hope this has been a good enough update for now. I am pretty sure I wrote some weird sentences up there. My English is getting increasingly worse. Marleen keeps quotes of the day. So to support my statement and end my email I will finish with yesterdays quote, which I typed to Marleen over Instant Messaging in response to a previous typing mistake: "Wow... i spealt i'll with 4 Ls and a K"



SARAH SCUDDER
12/19/07
IN ARGENTINA

I'm looking now for Spanish courses to perfect my skills and trying to get involved in a volunteering program, they don't have quite as many opportunities for that kind of thing as we do in the US but I think I found a good program where I would take a week or two of Spanish classes and then do four weeks of volunteering, that would be great. Christmas is going to be cool I think, to see how they celebrate. I think a lot of the teenagers actually go out dancing on Christmas day, but my family is a little bit more old fashioned so I think we'll all be spending the day together which sounds a lot nicer to me. Probably taking some time in the pool, because it is around 90 degrees F. here. Pretty crazy warm. I was wondering if you could still get me some banners from our Rotary club, because I went to a Rotary meeting last night and they were trading their banner with my friend from South Africa's banner and I realized with all the rush right before I left that I forgot to ask for them. If it's possible, I can ask my mom to pick them up from you sometime because I think I'm going to ask her to send me some more peanut butter to give to my next host family when I arrive there which isn't until February but Rotary here takes a break in the summer so there are no more meetings until February anyway. How weird huh? And we exchange students are only invited to 1 meeting a month, and they're definitely not as fun as our meetings in Arcata, but my counselor here, Jorge, is really fun; he came on the trip to Buenos Aires with us and it was really great. We saw a tango show, spent a day in Colonia, Uruguay and shopped in an artisan fair. I really am having an amazing time. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas and New Year celebration, and then afterwards it will be on to Mount Shasta to announce where all the new kids are going right? How cool is that