

January 2012 Newsletter

Spotlight on Alice Maclean, Fundacion Juventas, Colombia

My past six months with Fundación Juventas in Colombia have been an incredible learning experience. As I write from my home in Seattle, looking back on the amazing relationships I formed while in Tunja, I know that the full impact of this fellowship will not be immediately obvious. Through this experience, I gained a deeper understanding of what it means to be a humanitarian, a professional, and a global citizen, and I know I will continue to draw upon its lessons for years to come.

The Fundación Juventas is a small, young organization in Tunja, Colombia, a town of about 125,000 outside of Bogotá. The organization’s mission is to assist in the integral academ-



ic and social development of children, particularly those from low-income or displaced families. When I arrived in June, Juventas had never previously had a full-time employee. Right off the bat, this was a significant improvement, as activities and events that were previously sporadic were solidified, providing the dependable and stable environment that is crucial for at-risk children. Within my first two months, we began a schedule of weekly English classes, taught by native speakers and Colombian university students, as well as classes such as art and computer skills. These classes both continued and

grew during my tenure, allowing me to get to know lots of new students and their families.

One of the things that most interested me initially about working with Fundación Juventas was the opportunity to learn more about Colombia’s internal conflict and resulting displacement crisis. There are over 4 million internally displaced people in Colombia, forced from their homes by the violence that has plagued the country for decades. Having read about this sue from an academic perspective, I was interested in a better understanding of what the conflict really means for the people affected by it. I had the fantastic fortune of being able to interview five incredible women about the difficult, and sometimes terrifying, process of moving their families away from conflict zones and resettling elsewhere. With the help of a local journalist, I then compiled their testimonies into a collection of stories I call the Oral Histories Project.



A common theme among these women was their ability to live under extremely stressful and dangerous conditions. While much of Colombian territory has been reclaimed by the government in recent years, many areas still

still remain or until recently remained under the control of the left-wing guerrilla (primarily the FARC) or the right-wing paramilitaries. In these “zonas rojas” (red zones), residents live in fear of physical violence and significant financial extortion, in the form of an informal protection tax that is often crippling high. Once they escape to safer areas such as Tunja, however, they face the enormous challenge of rebuilding their lives from the ground up – many leave with just the clothes on their back and know no one upon arrival. Organizations such as Fundación Juventas fill the gaps left by the government social services system in the complex and difficult relocation process.

The women that participated in my Oral Histories project were incredibly forthcoming with the painful details of their displacement, and their willingness to share with me was touching, humbling and extremely illuminating. These types of relationships are, to me, the reason that I seek out cultural immersion experiences: the ability to see the reality of another country from the eyes of its citizens, and use that to inform my own constantly evolving understanding of the world. For that opportunity, I am so thankful for PiLA and the Colombian puerta it opened for me.



Lucy McDonald Stewart, Human Rights Watch/CELE, Buenos Aires:

Every morning, I walk half an hour from my house to the University of Palermo. The morning walk is usually calm and sunny, as I stroll beneath giant trees, past vegetable stands, pizza and empanada restaurants, and cafes beginning to fill with customers. It is 10 o'clock and most stores and restaurants along my route are still closed. This is because Argentines are nocturnal. I still remember the first time I saw someone walking a dog at 1am and the time I tried to go out to eat at 7pm and couldn't find a restaurant open. Since then I have learned that many restaurants are closed from 3 or 4 until 8pm and no one arrives for dinner until 9 and if you want to go out dancing there is no point leaving until 1am unless you want to be dancing by yourself.

I arrived in Argentina with an open mind, not knowing quite what to expect and still Argentina managed to surprise me. Although I had lived in Chile and Colombia previously, Argentina was different, allegedly more European than its Latin American neighbors. Since being here, I have learned that if Argentines are proud of their European heritage, they are even prouder of their Argentine heritage. In every neighborhood there are pizza restaurants, stores where you can buy freshly made pasta, and Italian-style delis, but equally, if not more, important is the ritualistic tradition of drinking mate. Yerba mate is a strong green tea brewed



in a gourd and passed around in a group or sipped alone out of a metal straw. The tradition comes from indigenous peoples from the area and is such an important part of Argentine life that many Argentines have gourds in their homes and at their workplaces. Frequently social invitations start with, "Che, querés tomar un maté?" (Hey, do you want to drink a mate?).

Another source of Argentine pride is their accent and way of speaking. The Argentine accent takes unexpected twists and turns in its sing-song rhythm that are sometimes hard for me to follow and often, Argentine strangers seem almost offended when I address them with a formal "usted" instead of their typical "vos" until they realize that I am not Argentine. Occasionally an Argentine will pick up on my slight Chilean accent leftover from studying abroad in Chile and start joking with me about Argentina's old rivalry with its neighbor.

When asked why they dislike Chileans, every Argentine will give you a different reason whether historical, border disputes, or simply that Chileans are "mala gente" (bad people). Fortunately for me, my Chilean accent is not too strong.

While learning about and living in Argentine culture has been a part of my experience here, unlike many other Pila fellows, most of my work does not relate to my immediate environment. From the CELE office in Buenos Aires, I research topics on human rights and freedom of expression in countries all over Latin America, with an emphasis on the Andean region. I divide my time between Human Rights Watch, an international organization based in the U.S., and CELE, a local organization working on freedom of expression issues in the region. Every day I read newspapers from Mexico, Ecuador, and Honduras and then move on to researching other issues for each organization. In the six months I have spent here my research with Human Rights Watch has



focused on Venezuela, Mexico, and Ecuador. With CELE I have worked on a project on media self-regulation and communications laws in Latin America.

It is easy to get caught up in day-to-day tasks and forget about the larger picture while I'm researching specific details. A few weeks ago while chatting with friends in Spanish, the conversation turned to political and human rights issues in Venezuela. As I was telling them some of what I had learned from my work, I realized how much I knew and that they were all listening to me attentively. Later, as we walked to the bus stop, my friend from the U.S. told me how impressed she was with my knowledge and vocabulary for expressing the concepts I was presenting in the conversation and said she wanted to talk more about Latin American politics with me. In addition to being flattered, I was excited that I had the knowledge to talk about current events in politics and human rights in the region, topics of great interest to me.

Living in Argentina has been an adventure in many ways, some quiet and some louder. I have really enjoyed being close to Chile which meant that a friend came to visit me here for my birthday and I was able to go visit friends and celebrate Chile's independence day. I also had the chance to spend a long weekend in Uruguay in a little surfing town and watch the sun rise out of the ocean. I spent a summer Christmas here and rang in the New Year on a roof with a ragtag group of Argentines, Colombians, and one Swede, scared out of my wits as they set off fireworks and more streamed through the sky from every rooftop. When I had a moment to pause from biting my nails and scanning the sky above me for falling sparks, I was able to appreciate the beauty of the fireworks coming from all around us, representing all the people celebrating in the city, celebrating a New Year and a new beginning.



News from the Field

December and early January have been busy months for PiLAs past and current. Here are a few items coming in from the Southern Cone. In the first, Elizabeth Washburn, Endeavor Argentina, tells us about an event hosted by Princeton's APGA and the Princeton Club of Buenos Aires, where she was a featured speaker. In the second, Jessica Sturzenegger, 2010-11 Mujeres Empresarias Fellow, brings us up to date on her entrepreneurial strides in Chile!

Elizabeth Washburn:

The APGA and Princeton in Latin America co-sponsored an alumni dinner on December 19 in Buenos Aires with alumni ranging from '58 to '08 and '11. Argentine ambassador to Denmark Hon. Raul Ricardes '75, former DuPont director Dr. Joseph Levy '58, and PiLA fellow Elizabeth Washburn '08 shared thoughts on "how Princeton changed my life." The dinner was a welcome opportunity for Argentine and North American Princeton alumni from diverse class years, academic focus, and professional backgrounds, to exchange stories of campus and celebrate the strength of the alumni network even 5,000 miles from Princeton.

Here are some photos from the event:



Jessica Sturzenegger: Startup Chile is a program created by the Chilean Government that seeks to attract early stage, high-potential entrepreneurs to bootstrap their startups in Chile, using it as a platform to go global. The end goal of the accelerator program is to convert Chile into the definitive innovation and entrepreneurial hub of Latin America; this is a mission shared by the Government of Chile and is a primary focus of the Ministry of Economy. They provide startups with US\$40,000 of equity-free seed capital, and a temporary 1-year visa to develop their projects for six months, along with access to the most potent social and capital networks in the country. After her work with entrepreneurs at Mujeres Empresarias, Jessica was eager to put the theory into practice and applied with two of her friends to Startup Chile. The team received the seed capital and are currently working hard to launch the first natural, nutritious baby food from Patagonia to the World! Thank you PiLA for opening us up to these incredible opportunities!

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends of PiLA,

The January Newsletter has, as you can see, turned into an Early Winter 2012 post instead. In my defense, there is a good reason! We had an unprecedented number of applications this year—280—that's 90 more than last year! December was spent reading applications and then in early January, we spent 9 days interviewing 125 candidates. While it is thrilling to see how much enthusiasm exists for PiLA fellowships, it was also a little sobering to realize that we cannot place more than about 30-32 fellows for 2012-13. Truly, it would be possible to have at least 50 outstanding and stellar fellows if we had the partners and the funding. Still, as it stands, we will certainly have the largest class ever this year and it will be a great one, indeed!

This edition of the newsletter brings you accounts from Colombia and Argentina—Alice Maclean at Fundacion Juventas and Lucy McDonald-Stewart at Human Rights Watch/CELE. I hope you will enjoy reading about their experiences as much as I did.

If you have not already donated, I hope you will take this opportunity to do so: <http://www.princeton.edu/~pila/support/index.htm> Our fellows bring a lot to the organizations with which they work and enable our partners to accomplish more with their resources than they would otherwise be able. I hope you will agree, after reading this newsletter and our past ones, too, that our fellows are certainly making the most of the opportunities that they have won as PiLAs.

Thank you for your support and your interest in PiLA.

Best regards,



Claire Brown '94
Executive Director

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