

April Adventures

Hello Friends and Family!

I hope this newsletter finds you well! The end of April and beginning of May have been filled with many different experiences and activities and I have tried to capture a few of them below. I had trouble picking and choosing what I wanted to share so I will warn you upfront, this newsletter is LONG!

One very wise teen from the community center recently told me that I need to live in the present instead of thinking about how quickly the end to my time in Argentina is approaching. Presence. How different would this world be if we focused on being completely present in our every day interactions, experiences and observations? Today as I was walking to the bus stop, I was thinking about how many minutes it would take me to get from the stop to a friend's house, and then how much time I would have to spend eating lunch before I needed to leave for the next activity. With my mind in the sky, I walked right past Julio, (an old friend of the Foresti family) and would have missed the opportunity to listen to him talk about his 'German roots' if he hadn't yelled '*rubia*' (blonde girl) to get my attention. What else did I miss on my walk while worrying about planning my day to the minute? Who would I have talked to and what would I have experienced if I had been listening, looking, smelling, and feeling (I know I'm missing taste, but in Argentina it's not polite to eat on the streets while walking!)?

For the past week (and hopefully throughout the future) I have tried to constantly remind myself to experience every conversation and activity with each of my senses (as you can see above, some days were more successful than others!). On Saturday Lela, a 3-year old girl, was sitting on my lap gabbing away and I tried to be 100% present, listening to her words, soaking up the sight of her bright eyes and cute smile, and feeling her warm little body resting in my lap. I smiled as I was filled with awe and love for Lela while she told me about her trip to the zoo. Through our senses I think we can come to better understand and appreciate the "other", and in this experience, begin to work towards justice within community through solidarity, love, and acceptance.

So the next time I find myself thinking about how long it will take to walk to the bus stop, what I should make for dinner, or how much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood; I hope someone like Julio or Lela can help bring me back to the present to fully understand and experience each moment and person. I have shared some of my more "present" moments from this past month below!

Peace,
Cristina

Everyday Adventures at the Cemetery: Part 1

Everyday I walk on the same street, Gaspar Campos, to go to Providencia or the elderly home. After walking this route at least twice each day for the past 9 months, I have come to know various neighborhood residents and vendors and look forward to our conversations in passing. I live one block away from a large cemetery and until recently, walked quickly past the tall concrete walls, looked up for a quick hello to the guards, and continued with my head down, speeding to get to my house. About a month ago, I finally decided to stop and chat with Omar and Eduardo, the two guards who work during the day. One chat turned into regular conversations and towards the end of April, I found myself heading to (instead of past) the cemetery to drink mate with Omar and Eduardo.

It was a crisp Monday afternoon, the leaves were starting to fall, and the streets were quiet for the afternoon siesta. I walked into the cemetery gate and found Omar and Eduardo waiting in their office, mate on hand. They decided to take me on the 'grand tour', explaining the various aspects of the cemetery. The cemetery is very large and are structured like a small city. There are tree-lined streets (sidewalks), with names and numbers to navigate the large plot of land. The social classes are evident in the differences between the small number of large house-like tombs representing the wealthy class, and thousands of crooked, wooden crosses representing the middle and poor classes. The large tombs are usually made out of marble and have a door with a window to peer inside. The tombs usually are constructed for various family members and you are often able to see more than one casket stacked on the shelves, complete with an altar in the middle displaying photos, flowers, and letters from loved-ones. The leaves crunched as we walked the numerous streets, learning small



amounts of family history with each tomb we passed. At one point Omar quickly stopped at a tomb with a broken window, covered in cobwebs and dirt; and began to tell a ghost story famous in the region. At this moment in the cemetery, standing on top of fallen leaves, listening to a ghost story, and drinking mate with two new friends who happen to be cemetery guards, in San Miguel, Argentina, I couldn't help but smile at the fact that such a strange experience felt oddly normal as memories of crisp fall evenings complete with hot cider and Halloween excitement rushed into my mind.

Let's DANCE!

In Providencia this past month, I have tried to spend more time visiting families in their homes. Every Thursday morning, Alejandra and her 6 daughters welcome me into their home and allow me to accompany them in their daily activities. I have really enjoyed getting to know her oldest daughter, Mikayla (13) who continues to teach me about Argentine words, foods, and dances. One morning I was sitting on Mikayala's bed chatting when she asked me how we dance in the US. She ran to the stereo, blared the cumbia music, dragged me outside, and asked me to show her how we dance. So I showed off my best line dancing skills (which consist of the electric slide) as Mika watched me with an amused look on her face. After a quick lesson in line dancing we began to dance a mix cumbia, murga, and rock to the blaring radio for the next hour. I had to be careful that my long arms wouldn't take down the laundry line and that my amazing gift of gracefulness (noted sarcasm) wouldn't cause me to run into the drying shoes on the ground. There was one point during this hour that I became aware of the smell of burning trash, the dust that coated my mouth, the sun beating down on my body, the intense blueness of the sky, the LOUD music, the precarious houses which surrounded me, and the sense of freedom I found in letting go of my own thoughts just for a moment and dancing with Mika, experiencing as much as I could from the moment.

Jumping Acorns

Aide (picture on the right) is a resident at the elderly home and suffers from Alzheimers. One morning I was talking with her and she kept repeating that she was bored of sitting in the same spot, so we decided to go for a quick walk outside. We bundled up in jackets and scarves and slowly made our way around the leaf-covered patio, enjoying the intense sun in spite of the cold air. At one point we started to collect acorns. Each time I would pick up a new acorn we would count how many we had already collected and I would put the newest edition in her hand. At one point when we were counting, one of the acorns dropped and bounced on the concrete ground. Aide looked at me with bright eyes and started laughing. I wish you could meet this woman, her smile and laugh are contagious. One by one we held the acorns up and dropped them, causing them to bounce on the ground. Each time we would do this, Aide would look at me and laugh. I still have the image of this experience frozen in my mind, the blue sky, the intense sun, the falling leaves, the gray concrete, the smooth acorns touching my hand, and the sound of our laughs as the acorns bounced up and down on the ground.



Missionary Adventures in a Cemetery: Part 2

Yes, there is a part 2. Saturday was one of the more memorable days I have lived this year. I woke up early to do some last minute cleaning and walked to Providencia to meet the pre-teen group and walk with them back to my house. The normally 20 minute walk back home took a leisurely hour as we soaked up the sun on yet another beautiful fall day. We arrived at my house around eleven and the group immediately made themselves at home; a few of the girls were on my bed looking through pictures, the two boys were playing cards, and the two youngest were helping me make pancakes for the rest of the group. At one point in the morning I looked up while describing a card trick to Mika, Ale, and Yani, the three "regulars" in the group, and watched Karen and Mylin giggling as they tried to flip a very large and oddly shaped pancake, heard Facu and Tyson playing soccer outside, and felt Brisa leaning up against me looking at pictures. I don't know how to describe the feeling that hit me at this moment, but it was a mixture of peace, contentment, awe, happiness, and community. I have been so blessed to have had the opportunity to spend time with this group every week.



After filling up on pancakes and dulce de leche Rosy and Ernesto came outside to say hello and offered to make the burgers left-over from Rosy's birthday. Thirty minutes later we were sitting around two long tables and enjoying burgers, sunshine, and conversation. One topic seemed to come up numerous times throughout our conversation: the cemetery. Ernesto decided that the day wouldn't be complete without a trip to the cemetery. We collected our belongings and made our way towards the towering white walls of the cemetery. Even though it was the middle of the afternoon, Ernesto brought his little pen-light and held it up to his face as he told the same ghost story I had heard a week earlier. For the next hour we walked arm-in-arm through the cemetery. The peace I felt this time was accompanied by a twinge of sadness with the knowledge that these intelligent, caring, funny, and strong kids at my side have lived in and will continue to live in a world where they first have to fight to be valued as humans before space is made within this society for their many gifts to be received.