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With *Love*, From Chile

A weekly look at another country's culture and customs

Random Chilean Observations

Charlie Remy
Columnist

I want to use my space this week to address particular quirks and other interesting aspects of Chilean culture.

Each one really is not sufficient enough to fill an entire column but nevertheless they add to the understanding of what the culture is like.



Uniforms are relatively important here. Almost all students wear uniforms to schools, whether they be private or public institutions. This is common in Latin America. Interestingly, many female students wear ties.

Both male and female student uniforms are dark blue and hardly vary from school to school.

Secretaries and other clerical workers

also wear uniforms.

Many tell me that they like it because they don't have to think about what they will wear each day.

I think this practice of uniforms for working professionals is classist. To me, it's a way of separating people in terms of the amount of power they have, creating a visual office hierarchy. These women should be able to wear regular clothes so that they appear no different from the people in power.

Finally, in terms of clothing, I have noticed that all nuns here wear their habits (veils).

In the United States, many orders of nuns don't require their members to wear habits. Helen Prejean didn't wear a habit when she came to Elon last year.

I see this as a double standard because the priests at my university never wear their Roman collars but simply wear a jacket and tie. I spoke to one nun and she told me that she is required to wear her

habit even in the mother house where she lives.

When I first came to Chile, I thought that people would go to bed relatively late.

In Spain, people never go to bed at an early hour, often falling asleep at 3 or 4 a.m. In Chile, the people generally go to sleep early. My host family normally goes to sleep before 11 p.m., sometimes as early as 8:30 p.m.

Sept. 18 was Chilean Independence Day and a tradition for all holidays throughout Latin America is for people to get completely drunk. I happened to go to a grocery store on this day and I could smell alcohol on the breaths of many people.

One man spent about \$25 on beer. It was obvious that they were drinking a lot.

In Latin America, where there is so much poverty, drinking is often a way to escape the harsh realities of daily life; a way to numb the pain.

Chile, like much of Latin America, has a slower pace in general. People are not in as

much of a rush to get to places like they are in the United States.

I have learned to not get stressed out if I am late because even if I am late, I am usually the first person to arrive to class anyway. Many classes start 10 or 20 minutes later than when they are supposed to begin.

On the first day of classes, I arrived at my classes on time and thought that I was in the wrong room because nobody was there, but eventually people started coming in ... later.

Although the pace is generally slower here, I have noticed a lot of fierce horn honking in the city.

People in cars seem to be impatient if someone in front of them is not moving when they can be. I hope that the Chilean society maintains its slower pace in a world that is constantly getting faster.

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Not a call to arms, but a call to hearts at Elon University

Rebecca Hilling
Columnist

Elon has prided itself in its many diverse volunteer activities on and off the campus. As students we actively participate in building homes for the needy, taking food to the hungry, and raising money for the sick. Yet, for many of us, the reality of our actions has not settled in. Is it possible that we do not realize the capabilities and effects of our own actions?

While we have helped children in different countries through programs like Operation Christmas Child, Adopt-A-Child and the efforts to rescue the Sudanese, we have left out the ones that should be the most important. Puzzled? Why am I not surprised?

Well, it's true. The foster care program currently houses over 500,000 children in homes across the United States of America. Just because they have a home, it doesn't mean that they aren't in need of help. The government has, once again, mixed up their priori-

ties. While the government-funded and supported program is receiving money, it is not nearly enough to provide for housing, mental care, developmental programs, educational programs, job training and mentors that are needed.

Even the money that is being received is being directed to other areas of need, like keeping children with their biological families or getting teens prepared for leaving the program as they turn 18.

The needs of the employees, foster parents, and most importantly, children within the foster care system have been overlooked. Your knowledge, support and participation in the program can make all the difference.

We take for granted the family and friendships that we have in our lives, but these children are going from one unfamiliar home to another, changing schools, having to make new friends. Many have been traumatized by their childhood experiences, being unable to function properly in society. Many are recreating their understandings of life, because

there was no one there through their growth to show them and help them understand. Many are emotionally struggling with being taken from their own parents, or being neglected and abused by their own parents. Some are coping with failed adoptions, failed homes, failed lives. Others are discovering mental disabilities and diseases, like having multiple personalities, schizophrenia, or obsessive-compulsive disorder which have been caused by the disturbing events that took place in their lives.

For those of you worried about making yet another time commitment to yet another program that will look good on your resume, maybe this message isn't for you. Or perhaps it is.

Maybe it is time for all of us to readjust our priorities and come to understand the true meaning of our actions. There are 500,000 children in our own country that are in need of our help. What are you going to do about it? This time, don't just pitch in a few dollars or a few meal plans. Don't just spend a few hours putting up a wall to a house. These are all nice gestures,

but they are too often void of emotion. Offer your services to the foster care program. Be a mentor. Be a tutor. Be a friend.

Spend one day, just one day, with a foster child and you'll understand. Some will want to tell you their story, and others will just want to escape it. Either way, you can provide them with comfort, support, caring, love and maybe even a little fun, something they probably don't get much of.

You could say this is somewhat of a "call to arms." Really it is a call to hearts. We are too often desensitized by the happenings of the world around us. Put your whole heart into making a real difference in the life of a child.

Just put a smile on their face. Make the world look better. Take the time to get to know a child. It is quite possible that your experiences with them could change the meaning of your life, as it did mine.

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