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## La Capacidad de la Fe

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## La Capacidad de la Fe

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"In the Fall semester of 2007 I studied abroad in Santiago, Chile. It was a big step to move to South America considering that my house is only fifteen minutes away from campus. I would like to say it was the easiest thing I have ever done, but at the beginning it was a terrifying experience. I remember getting on the plane and hyperventilating because I thought I wasn't prepared. My mind was racing with questions like "How can I manage the language? Will I make friends? Are Chileans nice?" I remember getting on the plane about to leave my country for half a year and thinking "Maybe there is still time to change my mind." Luckily I didn't change my mind and went through with it. It was the best experience of my life! What finally calmed me down on that hot July night was some prayer. I started breathing slowly and reciting those good old "Our Fathers" and "Hail Marys" I had learned as a toddler. I amazingly felt myself being calmed and almost immediately fell asleep. I woke up in Santiago de Chile. This was perhaps my first religious experience while studying abroad. Little did I know that there would be many more to come that would further teach me what people could do with the power of faith."

## Brief Essay



\*\*\* Prize provided by



MaryAnne Constantine

Fisher Alumna 1983

### **\*\*\* La Capacidad de la Fe' (1)**

In the Fall semester of 2007 I studied abroad in Santiago, Chile. It was a big step to move to South America considering that my house is only fifteen minutes away from campus. I would like to say it was the easiest thing I have ever done, but at the beginning it was a terrifying experience. I remember getting on the plane and hyperventilating because I thought I wasn't prepared. My mind was racing with questions like "How can I manage the language? Will I make friends? Are Chileans nice?" I remember getting on the plane about to leave my country for half a year and thinking "Maybe there is still time to change my mind." Luckily I didn't change my mind and went through with it. It was the best experience of my life! What finally calmed me down on that hot July night was some prayer. I started breathing slowly and reciting those good old "Our Fathers" and "Hail Marys" I had learned as a toddler. I amazingly felt myself being calmed and almost immediately fell asleep. I woke up in Santiago de Chile. This was perhaps my first religious experience while studying abroad. Little did I know that there would be many more to come that would further teach me what people could do with the power of faith.

Chile is a deeply religious country with over 70% of the population belonging to the Catholic Church. As a Catholic I knew that it would not be difficult to find a church to go to on Sundays, which comforted me. My host mother informed me that there was

one right down the street from our apartment to which she liked to go. So we started going every Sunday together.

Here it is important to mention that my host mother was seventy years old at the time, and I was twenty. It seemed at times that there were not many things that could connect our fifty years of difference and we even argued quite a bit. However, our shared faith allowed us to respect each other and look past our differences. She would introduce me to all of her friends as her new “gringa,” and I would smile and kiss them hello. Even when my schedule became hectic with university or traveling, I would always be able to go back to church with her. One of the last days I was in Santiago, she took me to a shrine dedicated to St. Bernadette with a well of blessed water. We went in December (the Chilean summer) and it was very warm outside. I watched as men would go up to the well to say a prayer and immerse their heads under the water, completely soaking themselves. Behind the altar was a beautiful re-creation of the grotto at which Bernadette saw the image of Mary. I remember thinking how much faith and respect Chileans must have in order to create something so magnificent in the name of God. I visited many churches while I was in South America but this was my favorite.

Chilean history is unknown to most Americans. Here is a quick recap of the last forty years. In 1973 Augusto Pinochet staged a military coup to overthrow Salvador Allende, the democratically elected president. This started Pinochet’s seventeen-year dictatorship in the country. Under his rule there was a secret police group named DINA (dirección de inteligencia nacional) that tortured and killed dissidents. There were thousands of men and women who were forcibly detained or disappeared over those seventeen years. Their families never knew why they had left or where they had gone; it was a very terrible time in Chilean history. I mention this because during this dark time of human rights violations there was a Cardinal in Santiago named Raúl Silva Henríquez. This man is probably the most beloved person in Chile because of his condemnation of Pinochet and his work in gathering documentation of human rights abuses, finding counsel for political prisoners, and helping people find jobs who had lost them under political persecution. He formed an organization known as the Committee for Peace (Comité Pro Paz) to carry out these tasks with the full support and funding of the Catholic Church. When men and women were being forcibly detained in the National Stadium (el

estadio nacional), he visited them and told them to have faith and be strong. He told them to remember that however much they were suffering, their families were suffering more being separated from their children, spouses, and parents. Cardinal Henríquez has become an inspiration to me. After learning about all that had happened I was so proud to be a member of my faith and to see all the good it had done in Chile. When I was in the country it was the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth and there were posters of him all over the city and even a parade in his honor.

Being able to practice my faith in a different country was very gratifying. It was an experience I will never forget. I learned some prayers in Spanish that I like to say every once-in-a-while to impress people. The best part of my time abroad was seeing how – although there are many things that can separate two people, be it language, race or class – faith transcends it all and one can come to realize that we are not so different after all.

Natalie Pellegrino