

# Home from Chile 'Land of Contrasts'

By SHARON DARNIEDER

Chile today is a country of contrasts, according to three Sisters of Mercy who work there and are home for the Summer.

Increased industrial production, an effort by the present government to boost the country's economy, goes hand in hand with unemployment. And Chile is no stranger to inflation.

Sisters Margaret Mungovan, Janet Korn and Marilyn Gerstner, all native Rochesterians, serve at San Luis, a poverty area Santiago parish of about 80,000 administered to by the Columban Fathers.

The Sisters' main work is in adult catechetics, with a lot of emphasis on the formation of leaders to train others.

Since the military junta took over the government last September with the overthrow and death of Marxist President Salvador Allende, Chile has experienced many changes and in many cases its population has had to adjust to a different way of life.

The economic situation can be summed up simply, according to the Sisters: high prices, low salaries, lots of things to buy and no money with which to buy them.

"Inflation is so bad," said Sister Marilyn, who's spent six years

there, "that although things are available now like food and clothing most families have no money to buy them."

"Employers don't have any money to pay employes," she continued, "and many people are out of jobs. A lot of the smaller factories and industries have closed."

Sister Marilyn has been in Rochester since June 22 and, in addition to just "enjoying being home," is taking a scripture course. She'll return to Chile in September.

The South American country has around 40 percent of the total world reserve of copper and "according to the statistics we've heard (from Chilean sources) copper production has never been better," Sister Marilyn said.

In describing life during the September uprising she said the safest place was "under the bed. All night long you'd hear machine gunning and that can't help but take its toll on the nerves of those who have to listen to it."

"Many of the people we know or have worked with have been thrown in prison or shot," said Sister Janet. "And the military took advantage of the situation to clean up the 'undesirables' in the country."

Sister Janet, a nine-year veteran, has been back for three



Photo by Susan McKinney

Sisters Marilyn [left], Margaret and Janet.

months and is finishing her BA in history at Nazareth College.

While speaking of the economic plight of the people during Allende's time and prior to the September uprising, Sister Margaret pointed out the extreme sacrifices some had to make in order to get food and other supplies for their families.

"Some would get in the bread line early in the morning and remain there all day, only to be told in the end that there wasn't enough to go around or that they would not be able to get all the things they wanted or needed," said Sister Margaret.

The Sisters were better off than others in the sense that they took turns waiting in line on different days. They weren't like housewives who had to use up most of the day standing in line for food.

The September coup brought about an end to the strikes and demonstrations that took place in Allende's time and brought a state of "pseudo-normalcy" to the country, according to the Sisters.

Although none of them condone some of the methods used by the military to bring about order, they feel the coup has provided a "kind of stability" for the country but one that's temporary and that has "come about because 'there's no freedom to protest'."

In May, the Chilean Roman Catholic Bishops came out strongly on several points, including the torture of prisoners, and issued a statement criticizing the military junta on its methods. The cardinal also issued a letter on behalf of the people's human rights.

Despite the country's problems many thousands attended a recent Mass for Solidarity, held in support of the cardinal at the Santiago Cathedral.

"It was just packed," said Sister Marilyn, "and that was good because it showed that everyone was unified."

But she described media coverage of the event as "very poor." The government now controls the media.

"Right after Mass we ran home to see the TV coverage," she said. "It only lasted a few seconds and consisted of the cardinal's face while he was giving the homily."

In addition to the Catholic Church the ecumenical church in Chile has also expressed its concern for the people.

The country is still under a 1-5:30 a.m. curfew and permission must be secured from the government to hold group or church meetings.

The Sisters said they admired the Chilean people for their efforts to overcome their present handicaps.

"Because of the tremendous rate of inflation," pointed out Sister Marilyn, "any money

anyone has goes into food. There's nothing left over for clothes. So a group of older people who wanted to do something offered their services as a sort of repair group.

"They obtained clothes, shoes, etc. and remade them, mending a tear where needed and in some cases taking apart an entire garment and making something new. At first they distributed the clothes only to those who were hurt by the coup but now they've branched out to give help to anyone who needs it," she added.

"No matter how poor they are," she continued, "they share what little they have with someone less fortunate. That goes for food, clothing, housing, etc. It's tremendous that they're willing to help their neighbors when they themselves have nothing."

The Sisters really enjoy their work among the Chilean people.

"They have a lot of faith, their own type of faith," pointed out Sister Margaret. "For example, they have a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin."

"They have a lot of resignation too," she continued, "sometimes too much of it. They regard many things as 'the will of God,' when sometimes they could change things a little themselves if they'd try."

Sister Margaret, who will begin her fourth year in Chile in August, acts as a religious advisor to a senior citizens' club in addition to her other parish duties of visiting the sick and the elderly.

She's very interested in the charismatic movement and in Chile works in the movement as part of a team giving retreats and seminars. While in the states she's been taking advantage of several charismatic prayer experiences in various parts of the country.

"Charismatic renewal is very strong there," she said. "There are over 20 prayer groups in Santiago alone, and many others elsewhere in Chile."

The Sisters have also noticed that the people they work with are extremely conscious of the family structure.

"They think we've made a tremendous sacrifice to leave our families and come down and stay with them," said Sister Marilyn.

"They don't quite understand it if we say we'd like to go home to renew our commitment to our community, take some courses, etc. But if we say we want to go home to visit our mothers they're all for it," she said with a laugh.

The Sisters usually try to return home every three years. In addition to them, Sisters Jane Kenrick and Janet Cauffield are also stationed at San Luis. Sister Doris Hamilton will be returning to the states shortly for reassignment, after three years in Chile.

Sister Janet, who came home in November and recently returned to the mission, took a clinical-pastoral education course in Central Islip, L.I. Sister Jane recently completed work on a master's degree in Latin American studies.

They expressed gratitude for their share of the proceeds collected in the annual diocesan May mission collection and for the support, financially, morally and spiritually, that they receive from their order.

They feel that even though Chile is operating under a new system of leadership, their objectives and goals haven't changed.

"Our whole objective is to teach the people a living kind of Christianity, to help them learn Christian attitudes," said Sister Marilyn.

The others agreed and Sister Janet said that she also felt it was important for them to show "continuing support to those people who were hurt by the coup, for example if they had a son or someone else thrown in prison."

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

### Sarah Child

Some years ago while reading a book by Bernice FitzGibbon titled "Macy's, Cimbels and Me," which was about her career as an overpaid advertising executive, I came across a bit of advice which I took to heart.

Miss FitzGibbon recommended keeping a large dictionary on a movable stand near the dining room table. When in the course of a meal's conversation a word came up whose exact definition or origin was murky, one could simply hop up and by turning to the right page, immediately clear up the uncertainty (and educate one's family as well).

About five years ago I was surprised at Christmas with the unabridged edition of the Random House Dictionary of the English Language.

We seldom eat in the dining room and we didn't have a movable stand. We did have an antique dough box from Pennsylvania Dutch country with a sturdy, if scarred, cherry top, however, placed conveniently against a wall next to the kitchen table.

With one grand swoop I swept away some candlesticks and other decorative pieces and almost reverently set the dictionary in place.

The dictionary, just as Miss FitzGibbon predicted, is in constant use. Sometimes we even consult it for words whose exact origin or definition are obscure.

To wit: While eating toast with jam the other morning I jumped up and read: Mar-ma-lade, noun. A jellylike preserve in which small pieces of fruit and fruit rind such as of oranges, lemons, etc. are suspended. Derived from Portuguese marmelada quince jam derived from marmelo quince which is derived from the Latin melimelum, a kind of apple.

#### COURIER DEADLINE

The Courier-Journal deadline is noon Thursday for articles intended for the following Wednesday edition.

derived from the Greek melimelon (mell (honey) plus melon (a fruit)).

Actually our dictionary has expanded uses which Miss FitzGibbon never mentioned.

On Page 3 is a wood violet collected from the side of the house and pressed.

On Page 31 of the map section is a drawing of a Great Blue Heron and text by our oldest, done in colored markers.

On Pages 300, 626, and 1508 there are Santa Clauses cut from wrapping paper which I plan to use for decoupage purposes. On Page 1745 is an 8x10 picture of our youngest, waiting to be framed.

On Page 1486 is a tissue paper vest pattern given me by my Aunt Louise.

On Page 1590 is a yellow piece of ruled school paper with our son's first poem which his first grade teacher labeled "Very Good." It reads: "A frog and a dog went jog, jog, jog. They climbed and they climbed until they fell and that's the end."

On Page 1863 is our four-year-old's diploma from nursery school. Page 1290 holds a dried flower book mark made by our nine-year-old-in-Brownies for her father.

Page 630 is marked by a greeting card with Fred Flintstone also earmarked for the kids' summer decoupage projects.

Under the dictionary are three New York Times Sunday puzzles torn from the magazine to be packed along with sharp pencils for vacation.

Also two articles from the Readers Digest: one on dieting and the other on how to handle your anger.

As you can see our dictionary has been not only a source but a repository. And I don't think you can ask much more from a reference work than that.

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