

I was fortunate to spend the summer of 2004 in Chile with the law firm Aylwin Abogados, thanks to a generous internship developed by Notre Dame Law alumnus Pedro Aylwin (L.L.M. '92). Working at the firm provided me with an incredible opportunity to learn about Latin America's civil law system, as well as a broad range of international law skills, including international trade and business, foreign investment, and intellectual property rights.

My summer also allowed me to learn about the struggle for human rights that has gripped Chile for the past four decades. As a student of human rights here at Notre Dame, it was this final topic that interested me most.

On September 11, 1973, a military junta, led by General Augusto Pinochet, overthrew the democratically-elected government of Salvador Allende.

Among those who survived the dictatorship's abuses and lived to struggle against it was the Aylwin family. The Aylwins introduced me to countless victims of the Pinochet regime, as well as to many lawyers working to protect and defend human rights in Chile. I heard stories of kidnappings, torture, disappearances, and denials of basic civil liberties.

One night over beers in a local Santiago pub, my good friend Carlos Bascuñán Aylwin, grandson of former Chilean President Patricio Aylwin, told me: "When I was in the third grade, my father told me never to enter into political conversations with my classmates. He was afraid the secret police would be listening, and I would be kidnapped." His statement shook me as I realized the highly personal nature of the repression that the Pinochet government had imposed upon Carlos and his family. But his family had not been alone in their suffering: Thousands of others suffered at the hands of Pinochet's repressive regime.

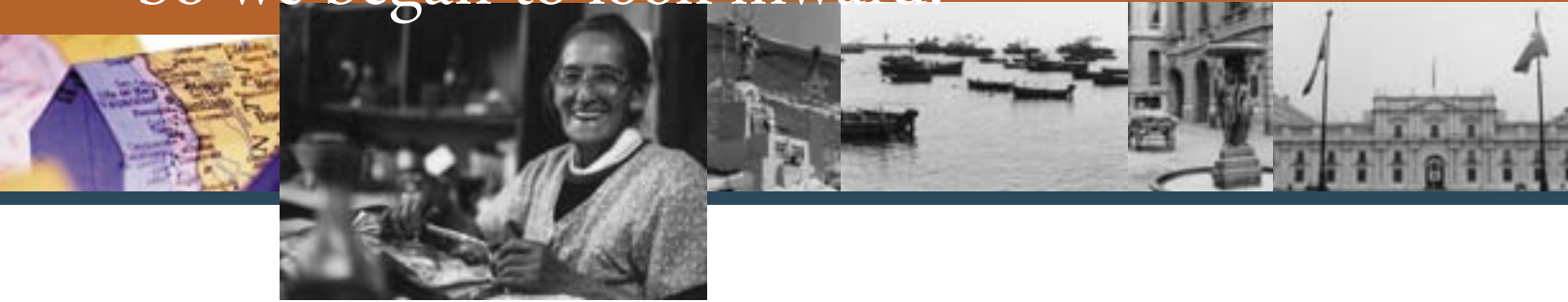
Chilé

From Oppression to Freedom



Story by Jeff Hall, '06 J.D.

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desert to the north, and Antarctica to the south.
We had nowhere else to go.
So we began to look inward.



In defiance of this repression, Chile emerged from the Pinochet dictatorship in 1990, led by Patricio Aylwin as newly elected president. I wondered how it was that a country could retain its resilience after so much suffering.

Later, I met Pedro Aylwin Sr., who was held *incommunicado* in a desolate detention camp 16,000 feet high in the Andes. He suffered from altitude sickness, malnutrition, and the uncertainty of not knowing whether he would survive.

“Other countries look outward in order to discover the meaning of their existence. But Chile is different,” Tomás Aylwin, a partner at the firm, once told me. “We are bound by the sea to the west, the Andes to the east, desert to the north, and Antarctica to the south. We had nowhere else to go. So we began to look inward.”

When Chile looked inward, it discovered a land of snow-capped volcanoes, crystalline glacier lakes, dense tropical forest, vast desert plains, and endless seashore. During my short time in Chile, I discovered that this magically diverse geography has led Chileans to cultivate some of the best poetry, the best wines, and the best foods I have ever tasted. But this self-examination also led Chileans to cultivate a sense of identity that empowers them to confront the past with perspective and the future with hope.

And, indeed, the future looks bright for Chile. Political stability, a booming economy, low inflation, and an expansion of the arts and social services have made the country strong. It seems that out of the oppression of a dictatorship, Chileans have persevered to live the dream of democracy and peace. I will always be grateful to the Aylwin family for the opportunity to briefly share that dream with them.