

Report No. 2 from Alto Cayma – 15 Jun 08

Introduction

We really hit the ground with shoe leather smoking this first full week in Alto Cayma. I can't believe all we got done, including not only the things you'll read about in this report, but also some preliminary steps on a possible major building project I'm not yet ready to talk about. And this with Gloria still resting to recover from a severe viral infection that hit her the last week we were home in North Carolina.

For those of you who were tuned in to the last series of reports, you will recall that I sold my trusty motorcycle to Adán, Father Alex' driver, just before leaving Alto Cayma last time. So, how long did you think I would be willing to walk when we returned? Answer: not long! We got here on a Friday. On Monday I went looking and found one. On Tuesday I closed the deal. On Wednesday I picked up the bike and took it straight to Primero de Junio to give all the girls in the cardshop a ride. They reciprocated by hosing it down with a couple of "chelas" (bottles of beer – a treasured local custom). So, what did I get? Why, nothing less than a Wanxin WX250GY. That's right, a genuine Wanxin. None of that Zhongxing or Baoding stuff for me, no siree! (Do you get the impression that Arequipa is flooded with Chinese bikes?) By Saturday, however, I had the bike at a mechanic's shop to get the rear brake actuation system rebuilt. I hope that's not a portent of things to come, i.e. I hope that the term "Chinese junk" still refers only to boats, and hasn't extended to motorcycles.

Visitors

Victoria and Alex are actually spending all day every day with us here in Alto Cayma. As Bonner Scholars at Davidson College, they're required to render 240 hours of community service in the summer, which they're doing during their 6 weeks with us. Their usual program is to work in Father Alex' Policlínico in the mornings and work in Serving Alto Cayma projects in the afternoon. On her second day in the clinic, Victoria gave 3 injections, which was quite an adventure for a girl who's still 2 years away from starting medical school. On Friday they both elected to work in Father Alex' community kitchen, chopping vegetables all morning and going on the food delivery run at midday. They enjoyed it so much that they want to repeat. In fact, they seem to be enjoying everything they're getting involved with here.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

Of course the girls are working steadily, making cards to fill orders that continue to come in as well as getting a head start on the thousands of cards they will offer for sale during the upcoming Christmas season. On Friday, however, they took time out to surprise me with an early Father's Day party. By way of background, when the group was first formed several years ago and they were looking for a name, I suggested Las Brujitas (the Little Witches). Needless to say, this suggestion was not adopted. However, soon afterwards I walked into the shop one morning and found a stuffed animal vampire bat taped to the whiteboard with a note that said, "The papá of the brujitas is the vampire", and that nickname has stuck. So on Friday the 13th, in honor of Papá Vampirito, all the girls greeted me in imaginative costumes and makeup as little vampires. I tell you, there's never a dull moment around here!

Acercándonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program

We brought over 100 letters with us this trip, from sponsors for their "ahijados" (sponsorees), many of which contained photos and mementos. Gloria and Giuliana spent many hours this week cataloging these items to keep them straight, and preparing the letters for delivery to the Cultural Institute for translation next week.

In the Acercándonos office, Luisa informed us that starting the first of July she'd like to cut back to working mornings only in order to devote the afternoons to her 3 children. Starting immediately, we're trying Giuliana as a fill-in to cover the afternoons. Her first day was Friday afternoon, the busiest time of all in the Acercándonos office because all the elderly descend on the place in mass to pick up their groceries. As Giuliana helped Tulita dispense the goods in the warehouse and debit each ahijado's account, Tulita was amazed to see that Giuliana could add the numbers up in her head. As Giuliana told us afterwards, "I didn't have any choice. They didn't give me a calculator!" (Each girl has a calculator with her name on it, because they are individually responsible for taking care of it.)

Salir Adelante ("Getting Ahead") Educational Sponsorships

I began meeting with individual students this week, starting with those who are currently in the crucial process of trying to gain admission to the National University. Our first meeting with all the students together will be next Saturday morning. I will try to pass on anything noteworthy directly to the sponsors.

Aldea “Sagrada Familia” (The Orphanage)

We held the monthly birthday party at the orphanage yesterday. Giuliana helped us out, as did Victoria and Alex. Besides the usual presents, Victoria gave all the girls ribbons for their hair and I gave all the boys keychains from Don’s Party Store in Round Lake, Michigan. (I tell you, we get support from all over!) Many of the kids gave Victor and me Father’s Day cards, but I was all mad because Victor got twice as many as I did.

Rotary Projects

Charlotte Rotary Container – As I made my rounds this week, I was pleased to encounter familiar articles from the 40-foot container which several Charlotte Rotary clubs and churches sent down here the first of this year. There’s a beautiful wooden desk in Father Alex’ office, with a nice All-in-One printer on the credenza, and another nice wooden desk in the office of Maria, Father Alex’ social worker. It takes time to get things distributed out, but they are being used and appreciated.

Family Violence Project – This week we received the welcome news that The Rotary Foundation has approved the final report on this major project. It’s hard to believe that this is the project that started our series of twice-a-year trips to Alto Cayma 5-1/2 years ago, in Jan 03.

Water Project – The Charlotte Rotary Club project to replace the water plant that supplies much of the water for Alto Cayma is still being redefined from the version that was originally approved by the Trustees of The Rotary Foundation. The objective is to buy the plant that will give the longest service life, and therefore the greatest return on the Rotary investment. I met with Carlos Cusirramos, the President of the Arequipa Rotary Club, last night and we agreed to a deadline of the end of next week to finalize our approach. We’ll seek a meeting with the managers of the Cerro Verde copper mine to see if they can help us fund the most expensive option. If they can’t commit immediately, we’ll fall back to the best option we can afford within the funds from the Rotary grant alone.

Our House

We finally put in for a phone line for our house, not so much for phone service (everyone here relies on cellular phones) as for more reliable internet service. The problem is that this area’s phone network is saturated, so we’ll have to wait who knows how long to get a line. Nothing down here works like it does in the States. Even the most routine things can become monumental tasks.

Happy Father's Day Finale

Besides the surprise party by the girls in Creaciones Angel and the cards from the kids in the orphanage, this morning the ahijados of Acercánonos set up an ambush for Father Alex, Papá Jim and Papá Victor as we were coming out of church. A recitation, a song and a dance were rendered to get our day off to a good start, to say nothing of hundreds of hugs and wellwishes. It's hard not to love these people.

And speaking of love, don't forget we're entering another week in which to

"Love God, Serve Neighbor"/Serving Alto Cayma,

Jim