

## **Report No. 0 from Alto Cayma – 31 Dec 06**

### **“Report No. 0”??**

During our recent 4-1/2 month stay (Jun-Oct 06) in Alto Cayma (Arequipa), Peru, I wrote a series of weekly reports to send to people I thought might be interested in hearing about happenings in Alto Cayma. As I went along, I kept adding people to the list of addressees. Now we even have addressees who were added during our 2 months (Nov-Dec 06) back in the States. The list now numbers around 200. Some of you saw all the previous reports, some of you came in during the middle of the movie, so to speak, and some of you are saying, “What movie?”.

Besides this diversity in previous exposure to the reports, there is diversity in the amount of direct experience you yourselves have with Alto Cayma. Some of you have been to Alto Cayma (perhaps even multiple times), some of you have seen presentations, some of you have just heard of the place, and some of you are condemned to be on the list just because you know me.

Because of this great diversity in knowledge and understanding, I want to give everyone a common baseline from which to understand the next series of reports which will run from now through the end of Mar 07. That’s why I’m sending you “Report No. 0” within hours of having gotten off the plane in Arequipa. I’m doing this because I am a very thoughtful person, and also because many of you said to me when I got back to the States, “Hey, dummy,.....”.

### **About Alto Cayma**

Alto Cayma is a settlement on the outskirts of Arequipa, Peru’s second largest city. Arequipa is 1,000 km. (a 14-hour bus ride, or 1:15 plane ride) south of Lima. From Arequipa it is a 4-5 hour drive to Puno, Lake Titicaca and the Bolivian border, and approximately an equal distance to Tacna and the border with Chile. Three dormant volcanoes (Chachani, El Misti and Picchu Picchu) form a semi-circle around one side of Arequipa, and Alto Cayma is situated “on the skirts of Chachani”, as they say here. The Chili River valley divides Alto Cayma from the settlements going up towards El Misti.

Arequipa is at an altitude of 7,800 feet, and Alto Cayma is approximately 1,000 feet above the city. Looking down into the river valley one sees green, irrigated fields, but up in Alto Cayma it is very arid, with very little vegetation. Being not far south of the Equator, the seasons are reversed from ours but the temperature doesn't vary much throughout the year. It typically is in the upper 70s during the day, and gets down into the low 50s at night. In Jul and Aug there are very strong winds every morning which fill the air with blowing dust and volcanic sand, especially up in dry, dusty Alto Cayma. Jan and Feb are the "rainy" season, but even then it doesn't rain much. On top of the volcanoes, however, at altitudes of over 19,000 feet, the precipitation falls as snow, making the mountains a dramatic backdrop to the city panorama. There are 300 days of sunshine per year in Arequipa which, coupled with the agreeable temperatures, explains why we say that every morning the people of Arequipa look out their windows and say, "How boring – another fine day!"

### **About the People**

At last count, there were 28,000 people living in Alto Cayma, with more arriving every day. People have been migrating for years from other parts of Peru to settlements like Alto Cayma for a number of reasons. Some, for example, came for security during the era of the Shining Path guerilla movement, but most come for economic reasons. Most of the people in Alto Cayma come from the mountains and highlands of southern Peru, and many of the older ones speak Spanish as a second language (the Quechua Indian dialect being their mother tongue).

When the people first arrive, they occupy any piece of vacant land and build a rude dwelling of "sillar" (soft volcanic stone) blocks, with a dirt floor and a corrugated metal roof. When enough such people, who are known as "invaders", have congregated in a new area, they petition the government for formal recognition as a settlement. Over time, the people work to improve their houses and their neighborhood.

Although the people migrate to the city for economic reasons, initially they may be worse off than they were in their mountain villages. They come with few employable skills with which to make a living in the city economy. As a result, they are relegated to performing manual labor for \$3-4 a day. Even this work is

unsteady, making each day literally a struggle for survival. If the family has several children, or elderly parents who can no longer work, this small amount of money is nowhere near enough to go around. Under such severe economic pressure, the elderly are often neglected. Also, since school supplies, materials and uniforms cost money, the education of the children must sometimes be sacrificed.

Generally speaking, the people bear their hardships with grace and keep an optimistic spirit. Since there is no economic safety net for poor people in a country as impoverished as Peru (the second poorest country in South America, with an unemployment rate of 50% or more), there is no such thing as an “entitlement mentality”. The people know that their welfare depends on their own efforts, they are eager to learn new skills and are sincerely grateful for any opportunity anyone can give them to help themselves to get ahead. Despite their poverty, the people readily welcome visitors into their homes and offer to share whatever little they may have. They also enjoy church and community gatherings and events, where they can interact with their friends and neighbors at no cost.

### **Who’s There to Help the People?**

The government in a poor country such as Peru doesn’t have the resources to help the people much. Their major source of aid is their parish priest, Father Alex Busuttil. Father Alex is a native of Malta and is a member of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul, a small religious congregation that originated on that small Mediterranean island. While studying for the priesthood, he had the opportunity to serve an internship with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and became devoted to serving the poorest of the poor. Two years after his ordination, he was posted to Pakistan where he served for 7 years, followed by 2 years in Libya before moving on to Peru. He served for 4 years in a parish down the hill from Alto Cayma in Arequipa before moving up to Alto Cayma 8 years ago. He speaks Maltese, English, Spanish, Italian, Urdu and Punjabi, although the latter 3 have grown quite rusty since he moved to Peru.

Father Alex has accomplished much in his 8 years in Alto Cayma (miracles, many would say). He built a Child Care Center which today provides early education, nutrition and other benefits to 120 children. He has built community kitchens with capacity to provide up to 650 nutritious meals a day for the most

needy. He has built two churches, and is currently constructing a new Pastoral Center to better serve his parishioners. He has built a medical clinic which offers the most commonly needed specialties (General Medicine, Pediatrics, Obstetrics and Dental) plus a lab, a pharmacy and psychological services. This clinic now has histories on over 9,000 patients. He has a sponsorship program with CFCA (Christian Foundation for Children and Aging) which helps support 300 of the neediest children. He has created vocational training workshops for knitting (both hand and machine), computing, and just recently the building trades. When people hear where he's been and what he's done, they think he must be 100 years old, but he's not. He's still an energetic youngster of 49.

### **How the Hintzes Got Involved**

I first visited Alto Cayma with a Rotary Group Study Exchange Team in Apr 00. The local Rotarians brought us up here because Father Alex is also a Rotarian. Father Alex had only been working here for a little over a year at that time, so everything was still in its embryonic stage, but I was so impressed with his vision and his methods that I wanted to ally myself with him. The next month I brought Gloria back with me for a return visit, and she was equally impressed. For the next 2 years, we worked to line up sponsorship in our Rotary home district (D7680 in North Carolina) for a project to combat Family Violence.

We eventually got 15 clubs involved to support this \$58,000 Matching Grant project, which gave us a reason to return to Alto Cayma in Jan 03. While here finalizing the plans for that project, Gloria decided to try teaching a vocational handicraft involving sewing. She came prepared to teach 30 women and 68 showed up, many of them bringing their babies with them. Needless to say, the training didn't go as planned, and nothing further came of that project directly, but the experience made a strong impression on Gloria in two ways. First was how profound is the need of the people here, and second was how eager they are to take advantage of any opportunity to try to help themselves.

When we returned to Alto Cayma 6 months later, Gloria decided to try teaching a different craft, one that had more potential to become a source of revenue, and this time to teach it under more controlled conditions to give it a chance to get off the ground and turn into something. This time Father Alex and

Maria, the social worker, hand-picked a group of 12 young women who were emerging leaders in the community, and this is how the Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Vocational Center began. For the 3-1/2 years since then, Gloria and I have been returning to Alto Cayma every 6 months. In addition to continuing to build up the cardshop, we have become involved in a number of other initiatives described below as well. As time went on and we got more and more involved, the duration of our visits grew from 2-3 weeks to 2-3 months until we finally built a house of our own right here in Alto Cayma. Now we typically stay for 4 months at a time, and the people here speak of our “visits” as those 2 month stints where we go to visit our family and friends in the States.

### **Specific Initiatives**

We (the Hintzes) have a number of initiatives which we have brought into Alto Cayma to complement all that Father Alex has done. I like to think of these as additional branches grafted onto a sturdy tree. The first is, of course, the card shop. Starting with those original 12 girls, the group has grown to as many 24. We bring new girls in every January to replace those who have moved on to other things during the past year. We have our own dedicated facility with capacity for up to 27 girls to work. The girls make almost 200 different models of greeting cards, all of which can be seen on our website ([www.serving-alto-cayma.info](http://www.serving-alto-cayma.info)). Over the years, the quality of the girls’ work has risen from “rustic” to superlative, and people are amazed at the beauty and artistry represented by these cards. What’s most important to us, however, is what belonging to this group does to improve the overall quality of the lives of the girls and their families. Not only can they make 3-4 times as much per day in cardmaking as they could in any other endeavor available to them, but also they learn new skills and values that will serve them well in whatever they do in life.

Another vocational training initiative is one that wasn’t started by us, but rather by a man we brought here for a visit. Dwight Hartsell, from Advent Lutheran Church in Charlotte, NC, has a passion for woodturning and a passion for helping people. He had the idea of starting a woodturning school here to help additional people learn productive skills similar to the cardmaking, and we have worked with him to develop this idea. We started with a single lathe (which has now grown to 4), and Dwight has been coming down every 6 months to spend 3

weeks each time teaching. In between his visits, we have had a course taught by SENCICO, a government vocational training agency, and we have also contracted with a local instructor to teach woodcarving. We call this shop the Adventure in Faith Woodworking Vocational Center. We are now beginning to market the products made by our students, and are considering expanding the shop to include General Carpentry as well.

Another initiative very dear to our hearts is the Acercádonos sponsorship program. Modeled after the CFCA program initiated by Father Alex, our program provides sponsorships for elderly people in need as well as children. We currently have approximately 150 people benefitting from the program, and are always looking for more sponsors who are willing to commit \$20 a month to make a real difference in someone else's life. With our staff of 3 (Victor, Tulita and Luisa), we should have sufficient capacity to help up to 300 people here, twice our current number.

We have one initiative which is not being done with Father Alex, but rather with Father Frank, another member of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul here in Arequipa. Father Frank runs a shelter called the Aldea "Sagrada Familia" (Holy Family Village) in houses 60 orphans and other children placed there by the courts and provides daycare for another 40 children. We started a program where, for a \$50 one-time donation, a person can sponsor a birthday party, including presents for the birthday child and cake and soft drinks for all 60 kids who join in the celebration. For most of the kids, this individual attention is a unique experience in their troubled lives, and we have many touching stories to share.

We see ourselves as bridges between two cultures, one that is rich in material blessings and one that is rich in spiritual blessings, and it gives us great joy to facilitate the interchange of these blessings for the benefit of both sides. One aspect of this interchange is to always take people from the States with us when we go to Alto Cayma. To date we have brought over 60 people here, many of them multiple times. For those who can't come in person, we try to share the experience through presentations given back in the States as well as through these reports. I hope that you enjoy them, and please feel free to e-mail me with any feedback you'd like to offer. It's good for us to stay connected to each of you individually as well as to all of you collectively.

## **Terminology**

There are some terms I typically use in the reports which those who “came in in the middle of the movie” might not understand. For future reference, here are the ones I can think of:

Acercándonos – the name of our sponsorship program translates as “coming together”, which leads into the program’s slogan, “Sharing blessings, heart-to-heart”.

Padrino – literally “godfather”, this is the term for a sponsor in Acercándonos

Ahijado – literally “godchild”, this is the term for a sponsoree

Aldea – literally a “village”, this is the term used to describe the home for children operated by Father Frank

Policlínico – the name of Father Alex’ medical facility that offers basic services covering a range of specialties

Sillar – the soft stone, formed from white volcanic ash, which is found here in abundance. Easy to work, but strong enough to build with, this material serves for everything from the humble dwellings of the people in Alto Cayma to the majestic colonial buildings downtown that give Arequipa the name “The White City”.

“Love God, Serve Neighbor/Sirviendo a Dios y a su pueblo”,

Jim

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