

## **Report No. 12 from Alto Cayma - 16 Mar 08**

### **Almost Gone**

Well, here we are, with just 2 weeks left on our current stay in Alto Cayma. Two weeks from now we'll be back on the shores of Lake Norman, admiring the onset of another North Carolina spring. That leaves us barely enough time to clean up the "big chunks" of the things we've been working on here. It's hard to resist the temptation to take on new projects, but we must. Well,..... there will be a few exceptions.

### **Panic on the Dollar**

When we first started coming here regularly 5 years ago, the exchange rate on the dollar stayed right at 3.47 soles for several years. Then it slowly began to go down, through the 3.4's, the 3.3's and the 3.2's until late last year, when it started falling at an increasing rate. It crossed 3.0 by the end of the year, and kept on going. When it recently went from 2.88 to 2.81 in just the space of a single week, we decided we had had enough. We took all of Serving Alto Cayma's dollars out of the bank and opened new accounts in soles, exchanging at 2.80. That represents a drop of 20% in the purchasing power of the dollar since we started, which means that a \$20 sponsorship now buys \$16 worth, a \$50 educational sponsorship now buys \$40 worth, etc.

At the same time, prices of goods bought here, in soles, have been going up noticeably. The prices of many basic staple commodities, such as rice, bread and fuel, have increased over 25% in the last 6 months. This compounds our difficulties, but is especially a burden on the people, whose wages have not kept pace. They were already living on the margin, and now they're being squeezed harder and harder every month. I expect we will see a fair amount of unrest in the country in the course of this year as the people react to this pressure.

### **Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group**

We lost another of the new girls this past week. She decided this kind of work just wasn't for her. That leaves us with just 2 of the 7 new girls who came in in January. We're already looking for candidates for the next group to enter in June.

## **Acercádonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program**

We had the monthly birthday party for Acercádonos yesterday. That's the last regular reunion we'll have with any of our groups for this stay. (I can almost hear those jet engines starting to spool up.)

A big event this past week was the fitting of Luis Elguera for a hearing aid. Luis is a 16 year-old lad who has been hearing-impaired his entire life. Now, thanks to the generosity of Chris Connelly's Handicapped Medical Fund, his ability to hear will be much improved. The actual device, molded to fit Luis' ear, will be delivered this week. That's going to be exciting!

## **Salir Adelante ("Getting Ahead") Educational Sponsorships**

Four years ago Gloria and I struck up a conversation with a friendly hotel night desk clerk in Lima, and as a result of that conversation, today a young man is being sponsored for his last 4 years of medical school by a family in Holland. No, the desk clerk and the future doctor are not one and the same - the story is more circuitous than that. The desk clerk, who was also moonlighting as a tour guide, was Jorge Guevara, whom many of you know. We subsequently became friends with Jorge and his entire family. His younger brother, Ruben, came to visit us here in Alto Cayma a couple of years ago, and took back the story of what we're doing here to the rest of the family. When Jorge and his girlfriend, Betzi, started their own tourist agency, Jorge began to bring groups of European visitors to Arequipa. He would always offer them the option of going up to Alto Cayma for part of a day, and for some reason, Dutch visitors in particular would always take him up on the offer. That's how we met the Weijers family, who were so taken with what they saw here that they wanted to sponsor some worthy local young person's higher education, to make a permanent difference in the life of that person and their family. Just last week we closed the deal for them to sponsor Ezequiel Grover Cutipa, a very nice 19 year-old lad who had already managed to scrape by on his own through 2 of the 6 years of medical school in the National University of San Agustin. Now, thanks to the generosity of the Weijers family, he will be able to concentrate more fully on his studies, and it all started with a casual conversation one midnight 4 years ago. I love this stuff!

Yesterday morning we had the regular monthly meeting with all the Salir Adelante students. In addition to introducing Ezequiel to the group, we also introduced Shirley and Soledad, whom you read about last week. These 3 new members, on top of the 5 new ones introduced in February, bring the group's membership up from 18 to 26. This has probably been our major accomplishment for this stay, and it's one we hope to repeat. We had all but 1

of the 26 members present for the meeting (1 girl had an exam), and we had fun passing out a packet of letters which had come from students in the Mallard Creek High School Interact Club back in Charlotte. Our oldest student, Oscar, who is studying Business Administration, was especially impressed to have received a letter from Dr. Lew Davidson, a retired IBM executive who is now the Interact Club's advisor. We asked our students to answer these letters right on the spot, and they had a lot of fun doing so.

### **Rotary Projects**

I started out by saying "no new projects" these last two weeks here, but then we learned that the Board of Directors of the Charlotte Dilworth Rotary Club had just voted \$3,500 for our Home Improvement Initiative and \$1,500 for our brand new Home Rewiring Project. We'll probably break ground on a new room for Fortunata, one of our original Acercádonos sponsorees, before we leave. And then there's the application for the new Feeding Program Matching Grant.....

### **Palm Sunday and Holy Week**

Last night we were downtown and had to park the car wherever we could find a place and walk from there because traffic through the Plaza de Armas was blocked by a religious procession. This morning we had a Palm Sunday procession of our own right here in Alto Cayma, at Father Alex' 10:00 mass. This is the first time we've been here for Holy Week in several years, but it's really something to see and experience. You'll hear more about that next week, as we continue to seek opportunities to

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

Jim