

## Report No. 2 from Alto Cayma - 6 Jan 08

### Happy New Year

Happy New Year to everyone who is not in Alto Cayma. The people here get these good wishes in person, and it's part of the culture that you wish a person a Happy New Year the first time you see them in that year, even if it's the 20th of January. Today, Jan 6, is also La Bajada de los Reyes Magos (the Coming Down of the Wizard Kings, aka the Magi or the Wise Men), bringing the Christmas season to a close.

We're right in the middle of summer here, but I always find the seasons confusing, even though we live here most of the year. For instance, if what we're having now is summer, I don't want to see winter. We've had some sunshine and nice temperatures, but mostly it has looked like the Pacific Northwest in winter, with lots of rain and fog and cool temperatures. To add to the confusion, every morning we see more and more snow on top of the volcanos that half surround us, because at over 19,000 feet the precipitation falls as snow. So that's what midsummer looks like down here. And now I've got you just as confused as I am.

One effect of this weather is that our internet service suffers quite a bit because of the rain and clouds. Sometimes we lose it completely, and other times I can receive messages but I can't send. That's a partial explanation of why I may not have been responding to your e-mails as promptly as usual lately.

But our communication difficulties haven't been limited to just the internet. In the case of our phone service, I cancelled my cell phone when we left here last time and Gloria loaned hers to someone from whom it was subsequently stolen, so we arrived here in a phoneless state. This time we set about getting phones from a different company, Claro, and are trying to do it in our own names rather than bother Father Alex. It's turning out to be another object lesson in how things can be done as inefficiently as possible. Going to the main office of the phone company in Arequipa, agreeing to put down a healthy deposit, and giving them our credit card info, copies of our passports, and evidence of home ownership here should surely result in issuance of a couple of cellphones right there on the spot, right? Well, not in Peru. Here the provincials in a city of 1 million people apparently can't be entrusted with any decision more important than what's for lunch, and everything has to go to Lima. And oh, by the way, Lima also wanted a letter from the local Rotary Club attesting to what we're doing here. Hopefully Lima will respond tomorrow, and we'll get our phones without the process extending into a second week.

## **Serving Alto Cayma**

For the uninitiated, or those who may have forgotten, Serving Alto Cayma is our own organization which is independent of, but works closely with, Father Alex' mission. The organization Serving Alto Cayma consists of ourselves (Jim and Gloria), our staff here (Victor, Tulita, Luisa and José for Acercándonos, Wilfredo for the Woodworking Vocational Center, and Lidia for everything else), and all of you back home and around the world who support our efforts here. During our last home stay we added many new sponsors, more interested Rotarians, and many friends of friends to our network, which seems to be growing at an increasing rate. Now that we're back here again, our initial concentration has been on working with Lidia to improve the bookkeeping in all the areas that make up Serving Alto Cayma.

## **Visitors**

Our first visitor during this stay is one who came as a surprise, just as we were getting here ourselves. She is Gladys Diaz, the arts and crafts instructor from Bogotá, Colombia, who taught the girls in Creaciones Angel how to make the handpainted and handtooled Canson (vellum) cards which are the most exquisite of all the cards the girls make. Gladys is here for a month of intensive teaching engagements in southern Peru and surrounding countries, so she can't spend much time at all with us this time. However, we were able to include her in the New Year's Eve party we held at our house for the people who work most closely with us. It was a pretty simple, but fun, affair culminating with shooting off our own fireworks alongside those of all our neighbors up and down the "torrentera" (ravine) our house overlooks. We did, however, forego the bonfire that many of our neighbors built.

We're now starting to make serious, detailed, preparations for the wave of visitors from the States who are about to descend on us starting next week. There will be 26 of them in all, coming in 5 different groups. Luckily, all will be able to stay in the Volunteer House this time. That's getting harder to do all the time, as the popularity of this place continues to increase, so we consider ourselves very fortunate this time around, and thank our host, Father Alex.

## **Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group**

On New Years Day we invited all the girls over to our house to spend a relaxed afternoon catching up on what's happened in all our lives in the past 3 months. We had kept Gladys' visit to Arequipa a secret from the girls, and had her hide in her room as the girls were arriving at our house. When they

were all there, Gladys threw open the door of her room as the equivalent of jumping out of a cake, and pandemonium ensued. Gladys is a VBP (Very Beloved Person) with the girls for all that she has given of herself to teach them not only her craft, but also about life, since she rose from equally humble beginnings and passed through the same school of hard knocks that the girls are passing through now.

This week we had our first meeting with the 7 candidate new girls aspiring to join Creaciones Angel. It's too soon to even guess how many of them might actually make it in. We sent them off to get a medical exam and a psychological evaluation (at our expense, since they don't have any money), and they'll return to the shop next Thursday to observe how the girls work and also to take an aptitude test. There will be more steps beyond that as well, but I'll defer those for later.

This morning was the only time that Gladys had to teach the girls anything this trip, so for 4 hours she focused on those aspects of the Canson cards that the girls were having the most trouble with. Even though the girls are getting some training themselves, and the old girls will soon be training the new girls, that doesn't mean that production will grind to a halt. Holly Sims, who manages the card business for us back home when we're down here, sent us an inventory of the cards we left behind, and Gloria then developed a list of over 800 cards she needs the girls to make over the next two weeks to fill gaps in the collection. I would say that our girls are amply blessed with the "curse" of having too much work to do, as compared to so many people here who have no work at all.

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

The purchasing and delivering of extra gifts for Christmas is just about over now. This has been a real labor of love for Victor, and I think his happiest moment of all happened this week when he took Junior Montañez to town to pick out his new bicycle. I was amazed to learn that you can buy a good new bicycle here for slightly under \$50, and that's not a bad price to pay to put the biggest smile you ever saw on a young boy's face.

We met with José, our teacher who tutors all the Acercádonos kids throughout the school year, to put the finishing touches on the plan for Vacaciones Útiles (what we would call Summer School). He'll be teaching math and language arts to all the kids, and science to the upper grade kids in secondary school, plus there will be an hour of sports/art/chess/dancing options.

Just the other day we saw another instance of how Victor, on his own initiative, will do whatever it takes to see to the needs of our Acercádonos ahijados (sponsees). He showed up at our house looking all grubby and asked if he could borrow our stepladder. He needed it to fix the corrugated sheet metal roof on the house of Micaela, one of our very elderly ahijadas who lives alone and is further isolated by the fact she speaks only Quechua. Now, thanks to Victor, Micaela will no longer get rained on inside her house.

Yesterday was the monthly meeting of all the ahijados in the program, which for me is the most uplifting event of the entire month. This being the first meeting of the new year, there was a lot of administrative work that needed to be done such as issuing new carnets (credentials) to all 180 sponsees and getting the kids registered for the summer school classes. Victor also spoke of a campaign to save up enough money to acquire decent beds and serviceable gas cookstoves for those who currently lack these necessities. We also observed a minute of silent prayer for the passing of Richard Hirschboeck, an elderly gentleman in Wisconsin who had been sponsoring 6 children. Finally, after the meeting was over, Gloria and I had to step in and help Victor deal with a few hard cases where the people (sometimes the kids, and sometimes their parents) have strayed from what they need to be doing. We can usually put them back on the straight and narrow, but we also lose a few. It's frustrating, but there's only so much that we, as helpers, can do if the people themselves aren't willing to do their part.

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

Our newest educational sponsee is Oscar Garcia, a 29 year old young man who has been struggling to get through the university studying Business Administration. Oscar had been working his way through school as a dance instructor, but now our own Charlotte University City Rotary Club is giving Oscar full support to be able to finish his last 2 years without having to take any more time off to save up money. Oscar is so grateful, after having had to struggle alone for so many years, that he has volunteered to teach dance every day, at no charge, to the kids in the Acercádonos summer school program, an offer which we, of course, lost no time in accepting.

We heard a great story from the December meeting of the educational sponsees which we, of course, missed. We started these monthly meetings so that the students could serve as a mutual support group to one another, and it certainly worked as planned in the December meeting. Luisa, a 16 year old, had recently suffered an accident while riding in a "combi" (mini-bus) and was sharing the problems she was having in coping with what the accident had done to her appearance. Once she started opening up about this problem, she went on to share how she felt about having been effectively

abandoned by her father, who had gone off and started a second family and was no longer really involved in the lives of his earlier children. Luisa felt like she was the only one in the world suffering such a void in her life, but it turns out that a full 15 of the 18 students in the group do not have a father living in their household! Oscar and some of the other older students were especially helpful in getting Luisa to see she's not alone and giving her good advice. I'm sure she left the meeting feeling much better equipped to cope.

The Salir Adelante program continues to grow. Two new sponsorship offers came in this week, one from Charlotte, NC, and one from Holland (as in the country in Europe, not the town in Michigan), and in today's Masses Father Alex issued a call for candidates for an unfilled nursing scholarship we have available.

### **Our House**

Our neighbor, Glenda, who seems to have quite a green thumb, has been doing a great job of taking care of our flowers and alfalfa plantation for the past 3 months, and it's all finally starting to look like we envisioned when we first planted it. The children of another neighbor, however, recently stole one of our trees, and we've seen new flowers in various places in the neighborhood that look suspiciously like gaps in our own plantings. (I'm sure they intended to ask, but just forgot.) Back in the States we might blow a gasket, call the cops or take out a lawsuit for stuff like this, but down here we just say what the heck, the sun will still come up again tomorrow. I do believe, however, that Gloria is going to have a few choice words with the mother of the tree-stealing kids, speaking as one mother to another for the good of the children themselves.

And that's about it for this week in Alto Cayma. While waiting for next week's edition, please be on the lookout for opportunities, wherever you live and wherever you go, to

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

Jim