

Report No. 3 from Alto Cayma - 13 Jan 08

A Communications Breakthrough

Flash! We finally got our cell phones, after a 12-day full court press which included 4 trips to the phone company office, putting up a security deposit of \$270, and signing an amount of paperwork that would fall somewhere between that required for buying a car and buying a house in the States.

Woeful Weather

It's hard to remember that it's supposed to be summer here. The weather has been cold and wet, and one day last week we had rain so heavy that it caused considerable erosion damage in the dirt streets of Alto Cayma. Heavy rain is a real problem for many of the houses here, whose "calamina" (corrugated metal) roofs are badly deteriorated. Once the rain starts pouring into the house, it ruins even the meager furnishings the people have been able to accumulate. The problem is sufficiently serious that I'm going to issue a separate special report just on this subject.

Visitors

Gladys Diaz ended her stay in Arequipa with an exposition of her work in the Editora Perú building downtown. She did very well with the classes she taught here and the exposition was well attended, so hopefully she will be back here before too long. The exposition brought back special memories for us, because it was held in the same hall as the first public exposition of the Creaciones Angel cards 4 years ago, on Gloria's 60th birthday. Both Gladys and Creaciones Angel have come a long way in those 4 years, but poor Gloria is still stuck with me.

Here's a riddle for you. What do the following two scenarios have in common: A) Land in Arequipa at 3 p.m. on LAN flight 100 and spend a relaxing afternoon and evening, and B) Fly to Arequipa, make 2 aborted landing attempts, divert to Tacna, hire a car, drive 5 hours on foggy mountain roads and get to Arequipa after midnight? Answer: Each scenario was, in turn, "the plan" for Chris Connelly's and Frank Printz' arrival in our fair city. Unfortunately, "Plan B" was the one that prevailed, thanks to our woeful weather. Chris and Frank will be here for just one week. Their activities will be covered in next week's report.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

Last week I had the pleasure of addressing the girls with some very unique news. I said to them, "Hold up your hands, look at them, and think of the hundreds and hundreds of cards those hands have made. Now, I have just learned that one of those cards reached the hands of Elizabeth, Queen of England." You can well imagine the reaction! This story came to me via Maris, the Maltese nurse who works in the Policlínico. It seems that a couple in Malta bought one of our wedding cards and sent it to Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip on the occasion of their 60th wedding anniversary in November. The Queen's private secretary sent a nice thank you note which the couple then forwarded to Maris to share with the girls. I love this stuff!

Gloria told the girls that our Oct-Dec sales campaign was sufficiently successful that she could now raise their bi-weekly paydays by 10%, and that even with this increase, there is enough money in the pot to assure those paydays all the way through May 08. That news was as well received as the news of Queen Elizabeth. It is our hope that continued robust sales will permit us to further increase the rate at which the girls are paid. They could all certainly use it.

On a somewhat damper note, our woeful weather is causing the girls to have to press their cards under a heavy weight after gluing them to prevent them from curling up. Also, seeing the girls leave the shop at night and walk through the rain without adequate raingear inspired Gloria to buy ponchos for all of them which will be given to them on Monday.

The process for inducting new girls into the shop continues to progress well. Three of the 7 candidates have self-eliminated, but the other 4 are alive and well. They all had their medical exams and psychological evaluations last week, and all passed. Two have had their personal interviews, with the other 2 scheduled for Monday. Hopefully the population of the group is about to increase from 18 to 22.

Adventure in Faith Woodshop

The woodcarving group continues to meet and produce. We did sell some of their products during our Oct-Dec homestay, but not near enough to absorb their production capacity. A priority for this stay in Alto Cayma will be to explore the possibility of opening up a market locally, rather than relying almost totally on exportation as the cardshop does. I am now working with Wilfredo to determine how to equitably distribute the proceeds from the products which did sell.

Acercádonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program

Our "Vacaciones Utiles" (summer school) tutoring program got off to a flying start this week. Besides giving all the kids a general boost, we hope to be able to help those who failed courses last year to be able to recover them before the new school year starts in March.

Victor has launched yet another new career (I think this must be about his 7th or 8th). He's now in the roofing business. Every day now you can find his car circulating through Alto Cayma with shiny sheets of corrugated metal on top, headed for the house of some Acercádonos "ahijado" (sponsoree). This leaking roof business is a new challenge for us. We're taking action immediately to contain the damage, and will figure out how to finance it later. Again, a special report will be issued separately.

Salir Adelante ("Getting Ahead") Educational Sponsorships

In response to last week's call for candidates for nursing scholarships, three have come forward and are currently being evaluated. At the same time, however, new offers have come in from people in the States and in Europe to sponsor studies in whatever area the student chooses, so today Father Alex made another, unrestricted, announcement at all the Masses. We hope to see a large number of candidates come forward this coming week. It's awesome to be in a position to be able to tear down the wall of poverty which is the major barrier standing between a talented student and their potential career.

Aldea "Sagrada Familia" (The Orphanage)

We had the monthly birthday party for January yesterday, which was our first contact with the kids in the orphanage during our current stay. We were very pleased to hear that every one of them has passed their classes last year and will be promoted. That's no small accomplishment for kids whose lives are in such turmoil, and speaks well for the stability which the Aldea is able to give them.

Rotary Projects

It's time to revisit an "oldie but goodie", the project to combat Family Violence in Alto Cayma. This project has a special place in our hearts, because it is what brought us back to Alto Cayma 5 years ago, in Jan 03, in hopes of doing something meaningful to support Father Alex in his mission to help the people here. This major and multi-faceted project, supported by 15 Rotary Clubs in District 7680, took a year to plan, another year to get

approved, and two years to execute, bringing us to the present point where Father Alex has barricaded himself in his office to write the Final Report and put this project in the history books.

We met with Carlos Cusirramos, president of the Arequipa Rotary Club, this week to assess the current status of the Water Project for Alto Cayma being co-sponsored by the Charlotte Rotary Club. We learned that during our absence Carlos had to exert a major effort to "recreate" this project in the heart and mind of a new person who just took over as the General Manager of SEDAPAR, the local municipally-owned water company. That's one of the challenges of executing a major Rotary project, keeping all the cats herded during the long gestation period of The Rotary Foundation's approval and disbursement process.

The Home Improvement Program co-sponsored by several Charlotte area Rotary clubs has been in a lull for awhile, and we're starting to rebuild momentum. Last week we took a new candidate builder to the house of one of our elderly people to review a potential project. This week we'll see his estimate and determine if we can go forward.

Our House

One good thing about the rain is that it has made the alfalfa flourish, which is going to make a lot of local cuys (guinea pigs) and rabbits very happy. We've turned the alfalfa plantation over to Nilda, one of the girls in the card shop, and she and her mother spent many hours this weekend harvesting and hauling the alfalfa back to their cuy ranch.

And that's all the news from Alto Cayma for this week. Stay tuned for more, and don't forget to

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

Jim