

Report No. 13 from Alto Cayma – 31 Aug 08

Hear Hear!

It has finally happened! Miguel Angel's cochlear implant has been activated (at the lowest intensity level) by the audiologist in Lima, and he is now reacting to sounds for the first time in 13 years, i.e. since he was deafened by a viral infection at one year of age. Just imagine what it would be like to have sound suddenly become a relevant part of your life for the first time since you can remember! Now we'll be eagerly awaiting reports of how well he takes to the training required for him to learn to interpret sounds as useful and enjoyable information, a process you and I went through as infants without even having to think about it. The better he does, the sooner he can return home, but in the best of cases his training will probably require at least 8 months in Lima.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

Among the 1,835 cards sent back to the States with last week's visitors were 50 cards featuring the logo of Davidson College in North Carolina, cards which were ordered for the personal use of the President of that venerable institution. That doesn't quite rank as high as the one card which reached the hands of Elizabeth, Queen of England, a year or so ago, but it's pretty good nonetheless.

Taking advantage of a short break between loading up the last group of visitors and making cards to load up Jim and Gloria, the girls of Creaciones Angel took time out to go on an all-day outing with their children yesterday, with expenses underwritten by their friend Chris Connelly from Charlotte. We chartered transportation to go to a very pleasant park on the far side of Arequipa, where there was room for sports for the 20 girls and activities for the 16 children who went along. My favorite part was the cookout, with grilled chicken, potatoes, corn and fresh salad. It was also fun to see how 36 people and all their gear managed to fit in a 22-passenger bus. Needless to say, this outing did a lot to promote "togetherness".

Boulderdash

Last week I reported the discovery of 3 huge boulders just inches below the surface of the earth in the room constructed for little Karina by the Dilworth Rotary group. It took all week, but I'm pleased to be able to report that the boulders are now outside of the room, and the floor has been cemented over. The boulders, two of which are between 2 and 3 feet in diameter, are now sitting just outside the door, and almost block access to

the room. I don't know what the family will ultimately do with them, as their lot is perched on the side of a steep ravine. (Perhaps they'll "give" them to their nextdoor neighbors on the downhill side some dark night – "Say, did you feel that earthquake last night?")

Serving Alto Cayma

I'd like to take this opportunity to summarize where we are in all the projects and activities that take place under our umbrella organization, Serving Alto Cayma, and reflect on how we got to where we are today. It's useful to do this from time to time in a growing organization, to see if the model under which activities were initiated is still a suitable model for today's operation, or if some changes need to be made.

Our own independent activities here in Alto Cayma date back to the founding of the Creaciones Angel cardshop in Jan 04. Starting as a part-time activity for 12 girls to learn a new skill and make a little extra money, Creaciones Angel has now grown to provide full-time employment to 20 girls. The group currently produces on the order of 10,000 painstakingly handmade cards a year for sale in the United States and Europe, and with improved marketing, would be able to produce and sell thousands more.

As time went on, we began to spend more and more time here as Gloria would work with the girls from Creaciones Angel for weeks at a time. Since my role in this artistic endeavor was limited to hugging the girls hello in the morning and hugging them goodbye at night, I needed something to occupy the long hours in between, so in Nov 04 I started the Acercándonos ("Coming Together") sponsorship program, thinking we could help out a few kids and elderly people without too much trouble. This turned out to be a case of "Watch out what you ask for, because you just might get it!", as today we have nearly 200 people being sponsored under this program – 128 children and 70 elderly. Our involvement with people through this sponsorship program goes far beyond simply connecting them with economic benefits every month. It extends into providing tutoring for the kids, providing new experiences through the New Horizons youth group, and in some cases even looking after the needs of entire families.

Our first educational sponsorship began, just as an aside, in Mar 05. As time went on, a few more sponsorships sprang up here and there until finally, by Jul 07, the number of students supported approached 20. At that point it was decided to formalize the program, naming the group Salir Adelante ("Getting Ahead") and beginning a series of monthly meetings. In Jan 08, a campaign was begun to intentionally grow this group, and today it numbers 32 students.

In Aug 05, a special fund was started to support medical interventions to help physically and mentally handicapped children. This fund was joined by others which were created along the way to subsidize dental care, eye care and general medical care. These funds help make care beyond just the routine accessible even to the poorest people.

In Feb 06, we started another project, to provide birthday parties for all the 50 or so kids in the Aldea Sagrada Familia orphanage. As with all projects involving people, especially kids, there is a natural tendency to go beyond the original intent and become more and more involved in their lives, and helping the kids in the Aldea continues to be a growth activity for us.

In Aug 07, we launched our first fundraising campaign triggered by a specific event, in that case the strong earthquake which rocked the nearby cities of Ica, Pisco and Chincha on Aug 15. Then, in Jan 08, we launched a similar campaign to replace deteriorated tin roofs on houses here in Alto Cayma during a season of exceptionally heavy rains. These special campaigns fall alongside other, ongoing projects to help people fund Home Improvements, Home Furnishings (including “A Bed for Every Head”), and even provide bicycles for transportation.

As these projects came on, one on top of the other, we needed to hire help in order to cope with the expanding workload. Our current staff includes Victor (hired Jul 06), Lidia (hired Aug 07) and Giuliana (hired Jun 08), along with Tulita and Luisa, who help Victor in the Acercádonos program office. We also have a number of volunteers who help us on a regular basis.

So, as you can see, everything we’ve been involved with here has been on a steadily upward growth curve – numbers of people served, breadth of services provided, dollar volume of aid administered, number of staff and volunteers involved, and complexity of the operation. Each of our projects and activities has grown in the place where it started, and each still reflects some vestiges of the way it was organized when it served just a handful of people. Creating Serving Alto Cayma as an informal umbrella organization in Jul 07 was just a first step in consolidating and rationalizing the management of our activities. Throughout the current year we have been working behind the scenes on other, more far-reaching, changes. You’ll be reading about these as they fall into place over the next few weeks. So stay tuned as we seek new and better ways to

“Love God, Serve Neighbor/Serving Alto Cayma”,

Jim