

# Antonio Cruz: In Memoriam 1960- 2010

by R. Brooke Thomas

Last month Antonio Cruz was found dead in his home. He was the god-parent (a compadre) of my wife and I, and father of nine children including our god-child Victoria who we saw baptized. We had known Antonio since he was a child. His mother died early and their father, Leoncio, struggled successfully to keep the family together by buying cattle and sheep in the countryside. We followed Antonio as he grew up and found a life partner in Sabina, a beautiful woman from the community. Formal weddings frequently occur at middle age among campesinos (indigenous farmers) when the couple can afford a large party and a church ceremony. We were honored to be one of the sponsors of the wedding that went on for two days and nights of eating, dancing, drinking, and thanking the spirits. The party seemed like it would never end. When the first band became worn out a second one kicked in. It ended early in the morning under a bright moon with swirling silhouettes in ponchos dancing to a flute and drum. Children sat perched on a high wall taking it all in.

Antonio had a few sheep that he or the children pastured on the nearby community lands, and had a plot of communal land there were the family raised most of their food. To augment this he would do wage labor making adobes, painting walls, or working at the slaughterhouse. Sabina, in turn, bought a tricycle and sold baked goods in the plaza or at the Sunday market. As the children grew older they helped raise their younger sibs, ran errands, as well as herding and helping with the crops. In a way this is typical of poorer town residents (about a third the population) who just about get by. Nevertheless, the family seemed relatively happy and Antonio would whimsically comment about goings on in town. He loved to go trout fishing in the river with his homemade throw-line, and to his delight we would bring him new spinners on every visit.

I am not certain when his heavy drinking began, maybe seven years ago. Possibility it was when Victoria fell into the oven and seriously burned herself for this is when her epileptic fits stated to take place. We offered medical assistance, brought drugs, and got her a job in Cuzco, but she wanted to be home, and neither she or her mother would travel to Lima to see a specialist. In any case, Antonio started hanging out with drinking pals while waiting for part-time work and gradually became less committed to

their fields and herd. The family tried to pick up the slack by working harder but it became apparent they were on a downward slide. Assistance and stern lectures on our part served only as short-term solutions. Father Paul also would try to find jobs for him and assist with food.

Ultimately, at the request of Sabina, we helped the family board a bus for Cuzco where they could stay with a relative and she might find a job washing clothes. There, Victoria could get medical attention for her epilepsy. We visited them last July and although they were still living on the edge their faces were alive and their clothing well kept. Victoria had improved somewhat but at 22 still could not hold a job. Antonio, however, remained behind in Nunoa and his drinking continued. Alas, his body could no longer take the intoxicating but toxic flow of cane alcohol. Sabina and some family members returned to Nunoa for the funeral. She buried him next to his father in the town ceremony, sold the house, and returned to Cuzco. Neighbors doubt she will ever come back. A group of Antonio's friends from the US will erect a gravestone in his honor.

Many of us who knew Antonio will miss his smile, his willingness to help out, and his companionship. May he rest in peace and may the apus (the mountain spirits) guide him to the trout streams in the hills he loved so well. His tragic but all too common story serves to emphasize how difficult it is to live – to keep going - under such difficult conditions, and in what a delicate balance many poor people in Nunoa find themselves. It is the hope of the Nunoa Project that our work can lessen this burden by improving medical care, helping small-scale herders, and providing a better life for a new generation.