Postcards from Argentina



Craig Evans, a Music teacher at St Aloysius College in Adelaide, accompanied a group of Music students and staff on a Music Department trip to St Ethnea College in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2003.



Deeply moved by the experience, Craig returned to St Ethnea College in April 2004 with his son, Joshua, and spent six months immersed in the school and local community.

The emails Craig wrote during his time in Argentina, documenting his experiences and reflections, are recorded here.

This is Craig's story….

Circle of Mercy

What is Mercy?



Welcome to St Ethnea by Marita

Last year (2003) St Aloysius College's Music Coordinator, David Bramham organised an adventure to South America for fourteen St Aloysius College students and teachers, Yvonne McKernan, John Konopka, Danielle Abraham and Craig Evans. It was an amazing trip and I thank David every day for his hard work

The travelling party met a school community, *St Ethnea College in Bella Vista, Argentina* and were blown away by their warmth and generosity. The student population made a huge emotional impact on us and the experience left the touring party in tears when they departed.

What was the connection with St Ethnea College?



Grave site of one of the founding Sisters in Argentina

In 1880, a group of Sisters of Mercy set off from Argentina for South Australia after a chance meeting with the Bishop of Adelaide in Ireland. Within weeks of their arrival, they purchased a house in Angas Street and established their Adelaide foundation. The result was St Aloysius College.

The touring party experienced a strange spiritual connection when visiting the grave site of the founding Argentine Sisters on the grounds of St Ethnea College, feeling as though they were visiting lost family members.

St Aloysius College is a rich school by comparison and the school community set about sharing their good fortune.



Purchasing instruments with SAC donations

Donations flowed from the students and friends of SAC. The result – the presentation of a beautiful set of musical instruments and the birth of a new musical experience at St Ethnea College.

Mercy in action



Presentation of instruments to the school principals

The instruments were presented to the students and the two Principals, Mariana and Celina, in the school's foyer with Argentine guitar music accompanying the presentation.

A new music room was prepared courtesy of the Sisters of Mercy making their Retreat House room available. Music lessons commenced.

The students of St Ethnea appeared overwhelmed by the generosity of the St Aloysius girls and have written letters of thanks.



Beginning of an orchestra

An orchestra is being developed and very soon a fundraising day will occur, highlighting the new musical instruments. Funds will be raised for the children of the very poor barrio schools near the St Ethnea campus.

Mercy in action

Many skills and many people from St Aloysius College and the St Ethnea administration have contributed to this adventure occurring.

I say thank you to all, but a special thank you to the drive of one very passionate and hardworking person at St Ethnea College, Marita, the secretary to the Principals of St Ethnea. Marita and her family have made Joshua and me feel a part of her family. She picks us up each day for school and organises our daily events. Without Marita this project would never have happened.

Mercy in action

Whatever skills a person has, the effect of one person's action can contribute to an amazing result.

To all the people who have been a part of this project and the realisation of a new music department at St Ethnea College, Bella Vista, Argentina – thank you. Enjoy the instruments and more importantly enjoy the music making.

The school previously had no music room and only one guitar. The action of many has changed that forever. A good result.

Mercy in action

Craig

St Ethnea College Orchestra

The first rehearsal.

Clarinets 2-3 lessons
Trumpets 2 lessons
Trombones 1 lesson
Flutes 2-3 lessons
Percussion 2 lessons
Keyboard 1 lesson

All instrumental lessons, except percussion, are from a teacher who bases his teaching on 5 minutes experience on each instrument before leaving for Argentina. This is a lot of bluff!



St Ethnea orchestra

'A sweet sound.' The first notes were sounded today by the newly formed St Ethnea College Orchestra to an audience comprising of just five. Francisco, the front office worker, who was asked to be the very important photographer, Mariana and Celina, the two Principals, Andoniette, Head of the English afternoon sessions, and the school's Business Manager, Amelia. A sweeter sound an audience never heard.

If one thinks what that first tentative sound represents, an impossible dream, I feel proud to have been the conductor of such a beautiful orchestra. They were magnificent! They performed like professionals and were incredibly focused. They showed determined commitment.

They were playing instruments donated by others, the SAC school community and friends, but in their first sound they made these instruments their own. They were making music. Music in a school that had no music room. Music in a school that had one guitar. A very sweet sound in a beautiful room with a view.



Look at the faces of these children of this orchestra, children filled with innocent belief in their loco teacher, faces filled in concentrated commitment, focus, pride. They were an orchestra, a team, a group of young people working together, co-operating, searching for excellence. They were living a dream. When they stood to the rapturous applause, I felt a little smile deep within my heart.

Thanks to all for sharing in this dream.



PS I am such a proud Dad. That's my son in the percussion section. Wow, that wasn't part of the dream.

By the way, Josh decided what instrument he wanted to play. How could I have refused.

Craig

Guitar Heaven

Where do guitars go when they die?

Well, Argentina, judging from these photos.



Guitars purchased for music lessons

Thank you, Enzo Tronchin, for your generous $1,000 donation. The fifteen guitars you see here are but a few. Add to this the Electric Bass, Electric Guitar and Semi/Acoustic guitar.

The guitars without the students look sad. In the hands of the students, the guitars live again.

Music is alive and well at St Ethnea College. All classes in Year 7 and 8 have had drum lessons as well as guitar and electric bass guitar. They are learning the same program that is taught by the SAC Music Department.

All the musical arrangements have been created by David Bramham, the SAC Music Coordinator. When I teach these students in Argentina, I feel the link between our two schools growing closer.



Guitar lessons

The Argentinian Sisters of Mercy, the founding Sisters of St Aloysius College, are hopefully watching the events at St Ethnea College. I would like to think they would be smiling right about now.

Enjoy the guitars St Ethnea. Enjoy the joy of making music.

te mando un beso,
Craig

Every Audience is Important

Today was the big day for me. But…… it did not go quite the way the dream was supposed to.



South Australian Police Band (Pangalau 2025). Used under CC BY-SA 4.0.

When I was 16 years old, I was just starting my career as a musician with the Band of the South Australian Police Department.

On a cold day, not unlike today in Argentina, I learnt a valuable lesson in the Adelaide Town Hall. The SA Police Band is a very fine band. It usually attracts a very good audience at concerts. They have had many a full house in the Festival Theatre and are accustomed to very large audiences

I remember a day when things didn't go as planned. The band was to play for a large group of pensioner clubs at the Adelaide Town Hall. The pensioners were to be bussed into the city and it was to be a grand occasion.

The band had a beautiful program ready – Big Band, woodwind ensembles, various soloists. The stage was full of equipment for the big concert.



Adelaide Town Hall foyer (Coghlan 2011). Used under CC BY-SA 2.0.

The wrong day.

Seven people turned up. They just happened to be in the foyer. The buses would not be arriving that day. We played our concert to the seven people and they were a wonderful audience. I learnt that day that the size of the audience doesn't matter. The mark of a true professional is to provide entertainment. Our job that day was to play the best we could for those seven people. As always, the SA Police Band didn't disappoint, receiving an enthusiastic standing ovation. A very appreciative audience indeed.



Stationery packs donated by SAC Year 3 class

Today, something similar happened. A little group of Mercy students from St Ethnea College went to the barrio school, Comedor Angel. We were prepared with newly acquired Mercy show bags, courtesy of Kathryn Beilby's Year 3 stationery donation initiative. We had congas and shakers, bubble blowers, colouring-in-books – the whole kitchen sink of kids' entertainment in a bag and at our disposal.

Two children came to the grand gathering.

Not content, I hammered away on the Conga drums, calling for some attention. Two other children tentatively approached. I played on - an answer to my jungle drumming came in the form of a little boy across the way, drumming on his upturned rubbish bin.



Students from St Ethnea with Mercy show bags

He soon tired of my sad little act. Well, that was it - four. An audience of four for us to weave our magic.

The big day had arrived. We had painted their school the weekend before and we were ready to make the notion of school fun.

We had our audience. It was a special audience. It was a special audience for many reasons. They turned up and they were ready for the magic. But it was a special audience to me for another reason.

The very, very shy boy of 13 years who responded to my mad drumming had been standing down the road with his equally shy friend. The boy's name was Juan.



Juan and Craig

Juan is a boy I met here last September.

Juan is a boy who is critically ill.

Juan is a boy abandoned by his mother.

Juan is a boy who was beaten constantly by the male lovers of his wayward mother.

Juan is the boy who was inspired by the SAC touring party last September to draw a picture of his favourite soccer team's logo and attempt his first written letters.

Juan is the boy that SAC donations are helping to feed. One year of food has been provided for Juan and his brother as he has been abandoned by his mother, at a time when he is very ill.

Juan should be at home in bed. Juan was in the audience.

I can't say that my first encounter with Juan was everything I had hoped for. I had been writing to him for about seven months. My emails had at first been rejected by him, but as the St Ethnea girls persisted in reading my first email he responded with 'Read it again.'

He recognised me. That little smile in the corner of his mouth betrayed his cool exterior. That firm cool handshake of a young man betrayed his aloof position. Juan took up a seat on the opposite side of the little school enclosure. My feeble attempts to engage him were snubbed off politely.

But, as I taught the St Ethnea students the Conga drums and acted the complete idiot, I could see Juan's eyes watching all.



Comedor Angel

I thought I would take it further as this was the boy who had inspired me to try to make a difference. This is the boy whose story had touched me. If not for Juan's little drawing and first scrawled letters, I really doubt that I would be in South America today.

I walked bravely up to Juan, armed with a colouring-in book and some pencils and crayons. The book was a Hulk comic action-hero type book.

I was throwing everything at Juan. I quietly passed around the books and hastily beckoned Joshua to meet Juan. Joshua caught on and sat right next to him. I was very proud.

Josh and I went about the job of colouring in the Hulk. Juan, hiding his work with the cover of the book, quietly took up a crayon. Contact. We sat and coloured in together. Not speaking, just passing around the different colours. The guys doing what guys do.

The time came around to leave far too fast. The girls went about collecting the show bag contents. It had been previously agreed that we would take all equipment with us to keep it in good order.

I caught a glimmer of concern in Juan's eye. I asked the Spanish-speaking girl with me to tell Juan that he should keep the book for a week and we'll see him next week. A little nod but I caught a smile in the eyes. Contact.

Not a big audience. Not like the twenty children we had the week before. But a good audience. Not the standing ovation. But a hint of a smile.

I hope Juan will return. I hope that Juan stays in bed this week colouring that Hulk book.

I hope that the word will get around about the crazy Australian teacher and caring young students from St Ethnea's pastoral program, the loco teacher who bangs a conga drum and comes with bubble blowers and face painters.

I hope they will come to school. I hope they will see that school can and should be fun. I hope for a lot of things. But today was a good day. Another good day in Argentina.

te mando un beso,
Craig

A Gig to Remember

I write this letter feeling emotional.

I write this story with my brother's advice in the back of my head. 'Give more details for the people who are following your travels. Less emotion and more facts.'

This is South America. It is important to listen to Astor Piazzola's tango music to understand. It is important to read Chilean poet Pablo Neruda to understand. It is important to know that potential political parties here think it appropriate to offer one shoe to voters before they vote and then receive the other shoe upon completion of their vote.

How does someone write of Latin America without any emotion and without some passion?

I will try.



Playing music together at Comedor Angel

On Sunday morning I was picked up by a teacher from St Ethnea and her husband. Josh and I carried nine guitars to the car.

We arrived at Comedor Angel at 11.20am and were greeted by eight children whose age ranged from 8-16 years. None spoke English. I arranged the guitars on the grimy, tiled area outside of the small, disheveled one-classroom school. The small kindergarten chairs were set up in a semi-circle with the warmth of the morning sun on our faces.

A light, cool breeze washed over the barbed wire compound.

Gustavo, an old toothless helper at the community centre, locked the entrance gate with a heavy chain. I really don't like to think too much of the danger in what we are doing. Twice since being here, I have had my amigos say, 'don't speak English in the streets.'

My friend Eduardo told me reassuringly, 'It's not that bad. In 47 years, I have had only two cars stolen at gunpoint and only once been approached by a youth with a gun in the street. Oh yes, and there were two times in my factory that I was held down at gunpoint.'

I'm glad Gustavo locks the gate when we are in the barrios. I love Josh and I love the guitars!



I started teaching the shabbily dressed, runny-nosed, brown-eyed children the bass guitar as well as the acoustic guitar which were donated by SAC families and friends. Eleanor Rigby - The Beatles. Within 10 minutes the children were laughing and playing music.

A few bystanders were dumbfounded watching these children play in the tiny courtyard. The three or four thin, bedraggled dogs wandering the streets were also a little in awe.

I asked the teacher's husband, Lalo, to take a few pictures. He snapped off 33 shots! His words were 'They looked so miserable and sad when they started but within ten minutes I saw their eyes change. They were sparkling. They were sparkling with happiness.'

I concluded the lesson with a performance, introducing my class to the watching adults and babies in arms. 'My barrio music class would now like to perform Eleanor Rigby by the Beatles. They have had one lesson on the electric bass guitar.'

Not a word was understood by my class but as I whispered the 4-beat count-in they rose to the occasion. For about 1 minute in their minds, they were rock stars (well that's what I was thinking) and they were transported to a musical stage.



On a sunny Sunday morning in the barrio, we quietly packed up our guitars. I asked each child to carry a guitar in its case to the back of the station wagon.

As I waved goodbye that day, I knew that this was not just another 'gig'.

I have played in many concert halls in the world. I have played in the Australian Youth Orchestra in front of 8,000 people in the Albert Hall Proms in London.

I liked this concert with these eight children in the barrios. It is a career highlight.

I can't wait for next week. Another gig in the barrios. We're gonna rock that place before we leave!

Te mando un beso,
Craig

Mercy in Action

It was to be the most important moment of my project here. An invitation to speak candidly to the parents and students of St Ethnea College about my passion for Mercy, the efforts of the St Aloysius College and to highlight the work in music that I have been doing for the past two months at St Ethnea College.



Musical instruments donated by St Aloysius College

Instruments were laid out for all to see. The newly formed orchestra sat patiently through the parent/student assembly to celebrate Independence Day. They waited with complete fear to play their one and only song for this outing, 'Hot Cross Buns' (No. 16 in the training program booklet).

The talk went well. Modesty prevents me from saying more. Ego compels me to add that tears were-a-plentiful. Mercy was not only talked about, but it was also before their eyes. The middle-class community college was being asked to do more for the poor children next door. Australia was talking but was Argentina listening?

I was harsh and did not shy away from the call to do more. My theme was 'Only in Action does Mercy have a voice'. Tangible evidence of the spirit of Mercy was there before them in the form of unopened packages sent from a country on the other side of the world. St Aloysius College was asked to do something for the children of South America and they responded.

I stood before the St Ethnea community and told them that it was their example that had inspired me to action when visiting last September. But here I stood before them and said they needed to do more. The problem of poverty in Argentina requires this community and this country to do more.

It was a big gamble to speak so openly.

I thanked the Principals, Mariana and Celina, for believing in me enough to seek the school's and parents' support in this project. On August 11th we are going to celebrate 'Coin Day for the Barrios' at St Ethnea. Coin days are a very successful SAC fundraising tradition.

The orchestra intends to extend its repertoire for that big day. With luck we might be ready to play 'Jingle Bells' albeit a little early. I hope St Ethnea's school community joins hands with SAC who continue to work hard to improve the lives of the poor children of the barrios – students who live next door to St Ethnea.

After ten weeks of working in the community of St Ethnea College, I needed a break. I needed a holiday. The music program and the pastoral program had taken its toll and I was tired.



Craig and Josh take a break at Iguazu Falls

My new Argentine friends came to the rescue. We took a nine-day road trip to Misiones. Iguazu Falls was the halfway point of the trip and the climax.

I am not even going to list all that we did because it would not do justice to the incredible experience that these two families gave Josh and me.

What they gave us were the ruins of the Jesuit Missions and a farmhouse retreat alongside the Rio Parana. We saw Iguazu Falls and experienced motorized jet-rafting through the falls as well as an Uruguayan thermal spring water adventure park and historical sites along our journey.

All in all, we had an amazing time on this road trip through Argentina. I thank these wonderful Argentine families for their incredible generosity and for their sincere and genuine friendship.

I am again renewed. I again have the energy and determination to work hard for the remainder of our time here. So many things to do and so little time to do them. But I have a lot of friends helping me both here and at St Aloysius.

Friendship.

te mando un beso,
Craig

Where Is My Next Meal?



Family in the barrio

As I sit here about to write this story my heart is thumping, my fingers are shaking and my breathing is heavy.

I want to write about the barrios. I need to write about the barrios. I ask anyone who reads these letters to again indulge me as putting words to paper is a release.

Last September on our Music trip to Buenos Aires, a little boy went down on his knees in front of me. He was about 6 years old. I gave him a $5 note and knew I was doing wrong as it is really very bad to encourage begging. Many children are abused by their parents if the donations are insufficient.

The boy knew he had a soft target and really turned on the juice, pleading, clutching at my trousers and looking terribly tearful. Someone moved in and ushered him away. I was shocked and caught off-balance. I felt terrible and didn't know what to do.

What was the right thing to do? How could I help this child? I had seen poverty and felt its touch. I didn't like it.

That afternoon we visited our first barrio.

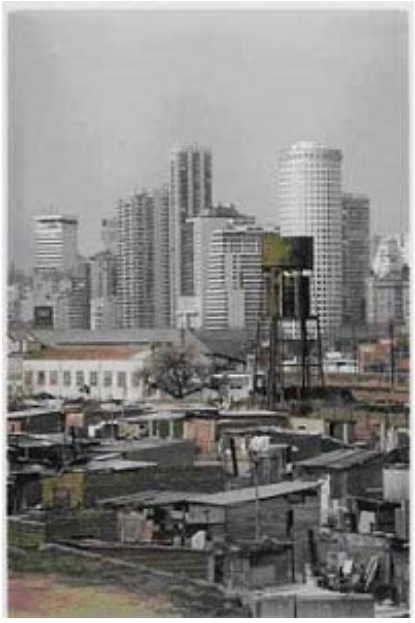
We lectured our touring party of students not to give money but to share our joy and work with the poor children of Comedor Angel, a community centre in the barrio. We sang, played, hugged and had an amazingly joyful and unique experience. We returned to our middle-class host school St Ethnea College and immediately shared a reflection on the experience.

The atmosphere in that little room was very somber. Danielle Abraham played a beautiful song. Music was her way of finding her own solace. I was crying uncontrollably. Tears were flooding down my face falling onto my feeble attempt at poetry.

This sad and pathetic attempt was a tearful diatribe to my son Joshua, promising to return to Argentina and work together with the children of the barrios. Gameboys, Nintendo and PlayStation – I wanted Joshua to learn a different perspective.

Argentina has a population of about 36 million people. They have enough resources to feed their population about twelve times over each year. They also have some very corrupt institutions. The words ‘structure and organisation’ are not well embraced here.

The English colonists left Australia with a good government system and in comparison, excellent social structures.



Barrios with city in background

The Argentine colonists, the Spanish, were a little more laid back, a little more ‘tranqilo.’ Hence, there was a lack of government and social departments to deal with the large influx of indigenous and disillusioned groups of poor people migrating to the capital, Buenos Aires from the provinces about twenty years ago. This resulted in the growth of the barrios. ‘Let’s just turn our eyes from the problem’ is always a good government solution.

The barrios are overpopulated, horrendously poor and there is a complete lack of government initiative to bring about change. Children live with mothers and fathers in ramshackle houses. Often the mother is on her own with her children and will settle with any man to protect herself and her family from the other men of the barrios who visit in the night. The men they live with are often abusive towards the women and her children. It is so sad.

What must life be like for children in these homes? They often find themselves abandoned by their mothers who are escaping the horrors of their chosen companions. Children wander the streets always in search of food. Guns, knives, hanging around the streets - and boredom. Some barrios are nothing more than housing amongst the city trash.



St Ethnea students

Last Sunday, my little guitar crusade to the barrio was aided by some of St Ethnea’s teachers, a parent and their children. We had ‘artisania’ being taught by two very talented girls, Lucila and Ines. We had people helping the 19-year old untrained teacher to organise her classroom. A guitar lesson took place with barrio children and middle-class kids from St Ethnea who helped to translate my terrible attempts at Spanish.

New toy baskets were put in place as well as new light shades, stationery and equipment baskets. Clocks and entrance mats were all helping to bring about a little more order to the chaos. Danielle, the barrio teacher and herself a child of the barrio, became very familiar with

my English words, ‘this, out, por favor’. It was a great morning. One that will be repeated this weekend. The crew is growing and I now take eleven guitars to the barrio.

Domingo (Sunday) is starting to rock!!

On Saturday, I visited a barrio project with a priest I have met called Luciano. Luciano should be a saint. He and two other priests are an inspiration. The three priests live in their barrio community and have organised a fantastic training and social organisation for barrio children and adults.

Activities include cooking lessons in their own bakery, metalwork lessons, brick and tile making, Arabian dancing, music lessons, computer and educational scholarships and the building of a soccer field complete with lights for night games. My projects are just a little seed still in the packet compared to the work of these wonderful men.

But our little group in Comedor Angel is growing.

Remember that $5 dollars and the little boy on his knees? I think I have found a way to help. Work. Lots of work. But very rewarding work!



Rosio

There was a little girl on Sunday who finally came to trust me. She had been terribly abused and when we first met I could not get a smile out of her even with my best idiot repertoire. But on Sunday there she was picking up my music and handing out guitar cases.

She still doesn’t smile much. I’m not sure she has much to smile about. She lost her 18-year-old brother four days ago in a stabbing incident at a disco.

The owner offered the mother a quick-fix payment to avoid further problems. The mother is a wreck and sits in a darkened room. Rosio’s dad is in jail. Rosio is about 6 years old. Life in the barrios is very hard.

I worked a little crazy this last week trying to save the world in seven days. I feel a little burnt out. But the best work I did was giving little Rosio a moment’s pause. A bit of a hug and a little job or two to keep her busy.

Many people have written asking about Juan, the boy who I have written about before. Juan has not been seen for quite a while and we are very worried. We will be searching for him this week. Life in the barrios is very hard.



Children living among the trash

Food is always on the children's minds. When asked by my team on Sunday why there weren't more kids around, I made the necessary enquiries. The children had gone to an Evangelistic mass. They hand out food there.

I am working to establish a Centre of Cultural Development. I have only a small amount of money left for this project, but I am funding repairs for electricity and the painting of an almost abandoned house.

We are planning to have a music room, a performing dramatic workshop area and 'artisania' workshop. Some of the rooms may even end up with St Aloysius College names. The other item I am funding is a table tennis table.



Life in the barrios is not only hard, but also very boring. The problem of poverty is huge in Argentina as in other parts of the world. But that little boy on his knees lived in Argentina and as a result I am in Argentina with my son Joshua. Working with my son Joshua alongside me.

We are always performing together. He has been an equal partner in this project. He has worked tirelessly alongside me. Nintendo, PlayStation and Gameboys are still of course on his mind but there are also a few things more. Josh doesn't go to the really bad barrio situations.

We are having a rest day today. For Josh, a little computer café, playing some games. For me, trying to deal with a very difficult week working in the barrios. I really didn't like not knowing what to do when confronted by poverty. But now I have a bit more of an idea what to do about it. Work. I am still learning from the real Mercy workers, Josefina, Maria and Luciano.

Thank you. So much to learn and do and only eight weeks left in Argentina to do it. Life in the barrios is very hard.

Te mando un beso,
Craig

PS Please say a prayer for little Rosio and her family.

Dare to Dream



Priest working in the barrios

Last year while visiting Argentina for the first time I had a dream. I wanted to return to South America with my son and do what I could to share my passion for music and in doing so, share my joy and goodwill with fellow humans. With the support of St Aloysius College and St Ethnea College, many of my dreams have come true.

I can't say that emotionally I am completely intact. I can't say that physically and psychologically I am as I was. Joshua, as well. We have probably experienced far too much in fifteen weeks. Far too many highs and some incredibly disturbing and shocking lows.

I don't like seeing a baby of six months being mothered by a six-year-old child. I don't like seeing the baby's ears clogged with earwax and face encrusted with mucus.



Living in the barrios

I don't like seeing women and children living in shelters, fearful for their lives from physically and abusive male partners.

Poverty itself is disturbing but add child abuse as a daily occurrence and I am horrified.

Add middle class enclaves perched opposite the poorest barrios.

Add ten-foot-high razor wire, shotgun-wielding security guards with German shepherds patrolling the rich neighbourhoods that sit alongside the poor.

When you are in the home of an appallingly poor person, being offered the opportunity to drink 'mate' with them and experience their overwhelming joy and appreciation at your visit, you begin to understand their difficult life (mate is a tea that is drunk from a metal straw and is communally shared).

There is sometimes no electricity except what can be stolen from a government line. Often the only water available is what they can carry from a Comedor, a place where people bring a plastic container and receive food at no cost. In some ways these centres are causing more problems as people are becoming reliant on them and forgetting how to cook. Barrios homes

often have no toilet. Walk through their homes and you experience poverty. Think Harlem, then times it by ten.

Clothing worn by the children is often supplied by Caritas or local religious or mercy workers and disguises their poverty. Argentina, with its Italian influence, pays a great deal of attention to dressing with style even in the poorest of the poor communities.

Twenty million people are living in poverty in Argentina. Eight million of them are in barrios or 'shanty towns'. Their population is often increased by displaced people from the provinces and from neighbouring countries such as Paraguay.



Roads made impassable by the rain

Yesterday it was raining. Rain in the barrios means no school. No anything! You can't walk down the streets. Every foothold is slippery with mud. It took us fifteen minutes to walk to our car, two or three streets away. Josefina, a fantastic social worker and child psychologist, was almost slipping to the ground with every step. I had to laugh – you need a laugh when working in the barrios.

So, rain means no school.

If the government wanted to help educate the children of the barrios, it would give them a road. No cars, no bicycles can be seen and only the foolish try to walk the slippery streets.

The mercy workers, or social workers if you object to the word 'mercy', try to make a difference but it was not so long ago, under the now deposed 'military regime', that these people were arrested and never seen again.

Today I visited a social project in the barrios supported by middle class teachers who commute for one hour and give up their Saturday morning to teach maths to the children of the barrios.

'I love it', said one 'English' teacher who teaches maths. 'I get to experience real appreciation that I don't see from the middle-class kids. These kids give so much love back to someone willing to help them.'

Education is a privilege.

Dare to dream



Coin Day fundraiser

When I arrived at St Ethnea and outlined my goals to the pastoral team, I expressed a desire to give Mercy a higher profile at the school. I described a typical coin day fundraiser at SAC and patiently explained the concept in detail. 11 de Agosto, St Ethnea had a coin day!

It was an amazing effort by the pastoral team. 450 pesos were raised in just thirty minutes.

This is a lot of money in Argentina. A huge painted circle, a circle of Mercy, surrounded two maps of two very different countries – Australia and Argentina. Within the maps were photos of last year's visiting St Aloysius College choir. Joining the two maps, in a bridge, were the letters spelling the words, Misericordia, Mercy.

Dare to dream

I envisaged a music program at St Ethnea. On Coin Day the newly formed St Ethnea orchestra performed five songs. 'Hot Cross Buns' again proved to be a crowd pleaser.

Later that day I travelled to four different projects in the barrios.



Sr Martha and Mercy workers

After a lunch with the Sisters of Mercy and my obligatory performance of the 'Cup Dance', I visited a Cultural Centre being developed by a young Sister Florencia. The plastic Cup Dance, dancing and football with the barrios kids were the highlights.

Then it was off to a shelter for older women without families. Sister Martha had me again play the Cup Dance. She is trying to develop in these women a sense of self-respect, self-esteem and social community.

The next stop was to a women and children's shelter. A shelter for violently abused women and children of the barrios who have escaped terrible circumstances. The Cup Dance was tested here. These kids were very distrustful of a male visiting them. I loved these kids and we ended up sitting on the floor playing cars by dragging them along the slippery floor under the table.

Dare to dream

I came to Argentina to share my love of music. It has taken me from Guarani Indian reservations to some of humanity's most difficult situations. My music has largely been expressed in the

form of a plastic cup performance, thanks to Susie Mashtoub, not the four years at the University of Adelaide.



Teaching the cup dance

I have played the Cup Dance for about 1500 people. I have played it many, many times. I have played Phantom of the Opera as a percussionist 2000 times, so this is easy! When I look at the smiles on the faces of these children, the abused women, Sisters of Mercy and mercy workers, I never feel tired of performing it. I feel privileged.

Just the other day, I was introduced as a 'Musical Magician'. I loved that!

I love it when the kids call me Professor.

I love it when I visit my local supermarket and they call me 'Maestro'.

How will I leave Argentina? There is a God.

I love Argentina.



Breaking the ice with the cup dance

I wonder how I will leave these smiles. How will I leave these wonderful new friends in just five weeks? I have met some extraordinary people in my time here. Many of them taxi drivers who I think have been responsible for my Spanish practice.

Josh and I have not found it all easy. Our relationship is strong and always has been strong but the last fifteen weeks has been a whirlwind of emotion and excitement.

Life in the barrios is not easy. Life in Argentina is not always easy.

But, I love these people and their country. I love their generosity and passion for life.

Dare to dream

I dared to dream and my dream came true.

Thank you to all who have supported the work I am doing here. Thank you to Sister Judith who gave me this opportunity. Thank you to Carol Grantham who has developed, edited and supported this project's website.

Thank you to Kathryn Beilby, Christine Simpson, John Konopka, Nick K. and many, many, many others who write to me when I feel overwhelmed.

As you can see from the above, departing will be difficult. But there is still a lot of work left.

A crazy beautiful experience in Argentina. I'll worry about my retirement later.

Te mando un beso

Love
Craig

Treasures Among the Trash



Volunteer tutors at Ava Tava

Barrio Mitre is built on the city rubbish dump. Some of the trash has been there for fifteen years. It is here that a Jesuit priest named Rodrigo has set up the AVA TAVA project. I had been invited as a guest performer.

Rodrigo showed me around his fantastic project which includes the preparation of a barrio's newspaper. Saturday morning study tuition classes, run by volunteer middle class teachers, are another aspect of the project. I saw percussion classes and art classes.



Percussion classes

Due to poor nutrition, many of these kids are very slow learners. It is common to see little children losing their hair. Slow learners maybe, but kids who are certainly not 'dumb'.

These kids can see the importance of education. They believe it may be their deliverance from the poverty cycle.

As I walked around the fenced compound, I was taken up to a room to see a painting that these kids of the barrio had completed. From a cupboard was brought a large plastic roll. Painted by the slow learners, children of the barrio, I prepared myself for a theatrical 'Wow, that's great!'



Painting made from discarded material and purchased by St Aloysius College

But look at this! I was gob-smacked! This is a painting of unbelievable beauty and made from discarded material. I wanted it. I had to have it. Thanks to another generous contribution from the St Aloysius College administration, I have the cash to buy it. Rodrigo is almost out of funds so this purchase will help.

Real beauty amongst the trash.

OK, so back to the special guest performance. The kids had been primed. The 'Musical Magician' is coming! All the groups were interrupted and asked to report to a large room for the visiting Kangaroo (Craig is just too difficult for the Spanish tongue). I pulled out about twenty plastic cups, something I have done numerous times around the barrios.



Rodrigo and Craig

But a good project can make a huge difference. In that room, where the children have love all around them and where education is taught with patient care, I taught the entire piece not just the short extract. The kids soaked it up.

As for the success of my little workshop, I like to think they enjoyed my act.

AVA TAVA is making a difference. When you look at these kids working in the Jesuit priest's project, you can see a sparkle in their eyes.



Children learn the cup dance

Their project is so good, their barrio so poor, violent, abusive but children are learning. Some children see hope for the future.

Thanks to the St Aloysius College community. The incredible fundraising you are doing is allowing me to buy art from really, really poor kids.

Te mando un beso grande,
Craig

Art, Music and Love



Work of art from the AVA TAVA project

In the poorest barrios in Argentina, I have just seen one of the most powerful works of art. It is important. It is important to me, as art is an expression as is music and poetry. Life for me yesterday was poetry.

SAC has a new work of art which was painted by children of the barrio. These are terribly poor and abused children who live in a very dangerous environment. I was fortunate enough to receive the painting on behalf of St Aloysius College. I believe it is a powerful addition to the SAC art treasures.

Below is a story from my great mate Josefina, child psychologist and educational guidance social worker, who works in the barrios. The story below tells in her words what happened yesterday.

Josefina wanted me to correct her words but I think, as English is her second language, she has done a fantastic job writing a beautiful account of an unforgettable memory.

Dear Christine and dear St Aloysius.

I want to share you, one of the happiest days I spend with your great teacher Craig Evans. I had the luck to share many visits with Craig to different communities centre.



Today I want to talk you about what happens yesterday during a Catholic mass in the Chapel 'Nuestra Señora de Lujan'. This Chapel is placed in Barrio Mitre, one of our poorest barrios of Buenos Aires.

I know you received a letter from Mr Evans talking you about the 'people living in the rubbish' in Mitre. In your website you have some photos of children in this unworthy place and soon you will see some photos of Mr Evans visiting the place.

I also know St Aloysius heard about AVA TAVA, this art project that try to build up dignity to children that lives in this poverty in this same barrio.

This is life in Barrio Mitre. Rubbish and Treasure. Your school has the pleasure to have one of this treasure that was made by the children of AVA TAVA in Barrio Mitre in one of these workshops. This collage was made of a picture of QUINQUELA MARTIN, one of our greatest artists that paint pictures of our famous "Barrio de la Boca". This children of AVA TAVA, with her great teacher Mirta, investigate about this artist and then they made the collage.

Craig was able to appreciate this work, and with your help, he was able to contribute to the successful of this project. He ask for the picture and the teacher and the student agree that it was a wonderful idea to 'sell' this 'cuadro' to your school in Australia.

I don't know if you realize how important is for them, in the conditions they are living, to know that their picture is taken to another country. For us it is a dream.



Handover of artwork at Barrio Mitre

Rodrigo, the Jesuit priest, was so proud of it that he decided to give the picture in the Sunday Mass. Craig and Joshua were invited to the Mass. After the Communion, Rodrigo with some of the children of AVA TAVA, gave the picture to Craig.

It is impossible for me to describe in few words the emotion the people of Mitre when Rodrigo explain them that an art teacher who came from another country wanted to take that picture to show his people how excellent work the children of Mitre were doing. They just couldn't believe what they were listening.

Then Craig stands up and receives the picture. It was great. Then Rodrigo invites Mr Evans to play some of the percussion instruments and the Mass turn into a real 'BATUCADA', just as Brazil. Craig holds up different instruments and tried to get the people to play it.

If Mass is to celebrate life this was one of those real Mass.

This people that return to the 'home' in the middle of the poverty, had a holy space to share happiness, and this was given by your school Mr Evans.

I hope you can share your community that this was one of the best Mass in Barrio Mitre. The parents when Mass finish came to appreciate the picture. They discover that their children were able to contribute to a better world.

The children get to where Mr Evans was and started to speak English. They said to each other that they realize that was important for them to learn English.

And this is just the beginning of our exchange between AVA TAVA and St Aloysius. So thank you for this great day and for this new Circle of Mercy

Josefina Bargo (AVA TAVA's Coordinator)

Thank you to the children of Barrios Mitre and the congregation. Thanks to Padre Rodrigo, Jesuit priest, who incidentally has great rhythm, for a treasured day in the barrio.

PS Comedor Angel celebrated its 10th birthday as a community comedor (food distribution centre, school and child-minding centre). To celebrate, SAC painted their school, gave them a sandpit, swing set,

table tennis table, eight new desks, ten new chairs, an electric heater, safe electricity, a new toilet system and a few other little fillers.



Rosio

Rosio, a little girl with a miserable home life, at first wouldn't smile or accept me in any way. Today she sat proudly for every photo.

SAC is giving Rosio's family a water supply and repairing her home. Pretty cool SAC students. I wish you were here to hear the gratitude and feel their heart-filled love.

Te mando un beso,
Craig

What the Hell Were We Thinking?



House in the barrio

It is one hour since I visited Barrio Mitre, probably the poorest and certainly the most dangerous barrio in Argentina. A city amongst the trash.

Josefina, a professional social worker/child psychologist and I got in the car after our walk through and both yelled, 'What the hell were we doing in there!' It was SO dangerous! It was SO tense. Really, really, really scary. Adrenalin pumping scary!



But for me it was a necessary experience. I didn't want to be someone who asks for donations and speaks second-hand about poverty. I needed to see where some of the children from the Mercy project AVA TAVA lived.

Every footstep and look was measured. My heart is still pumping as I struggle to control my thoughts to write this story. I want to capture my emotion and fear while I am still on a huge adrenalin rush.

I have experienced night scuba diving at Piccaninnie Ponds, a bottomless cave system in Mt Gambier. I have skydived at Lower Light. I have dived at Edithburgh, under the jetty at night,

and had an encounter with a Port Jackson shark (not really dangerous but when it glides up from the bottom it gets your attention).

But nothing compared with this – it was terrifying! It felt like we put our head in the mouth of a tiger and survived. I am still shaking – my body's reaction to the intense fear.

Let me relate how the day unfolded.



St Ethnea students learning cup dance

My morning.

At 9.00am I taught about a hundred year 3 and 4 kids the Cup Dance in the St Ethnea school cafeteria in preparation for the big music concert on Saturday night.

At 10.00am I taught another hundred year 5 and 6 kids the Cup Dance. Some might say teaching 200 kids at once is terrifying enough.

I was feeling exhausted and knew that today I was possibly going to experience the hardest day I would have in Argentina.

Yesterday I bombarded my support crew with emails – friends, teachers and students in Australia who keep my emotions under control.

I was fearful of the horrible injustices against children I would see the next day. I was scared for my emotional well-being. Really scared.



Comedor Angel 10th birthday celebration

At 12.00 Josefina picked me up at the front gates saying we had to go first to Comedor Angel, a very poor community centre I am working with, as they needed a camera quickly. They were celebrating their 10th birthday as a comedor (food distribution centre, school and child-minding centre). We hurried over and were just in time to blow out the candles.

As a result of our detour, we were late for our meeting with Rodrigo, the Jesuit Priest who was going to guide us through Barrio Mitre. As it turned out he didn't turn up as he was attending to a death in the barrio.

Not knowing where Rodrigo was, Josefina and I were sitting eating empanadas (pastry type things), feeling so stupid that we had stuffed up one of the most important visits to a barrio. We rang all around trying to find Rodrigo.

Josefina found Mirinda, a young man from the barrio who works for a project called 'Protagonista', a small credit agency in the barrio. He agreed to take us in. We knew we might not get another chance as Rodrigo was leaving for the United States the following week.



Children live and play in the trash

I told her that I had spent a day preparing myself emotionally for this and I needed to experience the worst of the barrios.

Let's do it.

There was trash everywhere.

Hanging around were large groups of very bored, tough, angry-looking youths.

Mirinda, a smallish man, respectfully said 'Hola' as he passed. He was very subservient to all.

Jose and I looked at each other and knew we were in the cage. The tigers were everywhere.

Rodrigo had told us that the only way we would survive was with him. His collar would keep us safe. Rodrigo always wears his collar when he enters the streets of Barrio Mitre. Mirinda led on.



We stopped at a huge trash heap where a young girl was doing the washing in front of her ramshackle home. We wanted a photo but were terrified to ask. Mirinda said 'Permiso' and explained we wanted to pass by her house and asked her if we could take a photo. She obliged. We entered and took photos of the 'war torn' looking structures surrounding us.

Then we were spotted by a group of people who yelled as they ran toward us. There were five in all – mothers, grandmothers, children and a very stout, irate looking man. They rushed angrily at us, concerned at our intentions. They wanted to know why we didn't ask for permission to enter the lane. The young girl screamed, 'Permiso, mi permiso!'

Mirinda looked pale and talked fast.

'I'm from the Chapel, Padre Rodrigo, Protagonista.'

They were cooling. Their anger stemmed from a photo that had appeared in the newspaper of children walking through the trash with a subline reading ‘a breeding ground for delinquents, robbers and kidnappers.’

The situation cooled. Jose hid the camera up her sleeve. She wasn’t parting with the film or the camera.

I was just thinking who was scarier – the guy or the grandmother. I have never seen such raw anger.

We were feeling the tigers’ breath. We were within the tigers’ reach.

Mirinda later told us that the most dangerous man of the barrio had worked his way behind our group, silently and inconspicuously. The man has five bullet holes in his torso. He is a robber, murderer of five men, but thankfully not a kidnapper.

The tiger was in front of us. The tiger was behind us with claws outstretched and poised for the blow.

’Chapel’. The magic word. Rodrigo is the chapel. Rodrigo is helping the barrios.

The tiger’s claws retracted. The silent man moved away. We walked on.



Child carrying a knife

A child of about 4 years walked up the street carrying a knife. I asked Mirinda if I could take a photo. ’Claro’ (Sure). Just as I snapped the photo, the boy’s heavily drugged father appeared, eyes burning, anger written all over his face.

His demeanour said, ‘Who are you? What are doing photographing my kid?’ He was not happy.

We moved on. We really moved on.

He followed.

He followed for a long while before disappearing.

We visited some families and took some photos of me holding a horse. I wasn’t going to refuse to hold the horse with about six young angry and suspicious chicos watching. Even the horse scared me.

The tigers were forming again, circling.

I was SO glad when the camera made its hissing noise to indicate it had finished. We quickly moved on and out of there. We arrived back at the Chapel and just sat and stared at each other. Jose and I asked Mirinda a hundred questions about what had just happened.

We were really scared. It was not the emotional stuff this time but raw fear. We felt the anger and danger of the barrios.

Children live in this place.

Children live on dirt or stone floors.

Children wander amongst the trash. It is their front yard and their back yard.

I can't believe these places. Poverty is bad enough but the abuse and danger in walking the streets is horrendous. Really bad if you have green eyes and are really stupid.

I want to help to solve some of these injustices. I want to save children from this horror.

I am sure later tonight, the images of children playing with knives next to filthy, contaminated water will bring on the tears.

Children die in the barrios.

I wish the word 'Chapel' would save them. But it will need help from all of us. There seems so much to do.

My friend Carol Grantham wrote to me. 'Craig, I hate gardening. It's such a big job, I don't know where to start, but a friend's advice was to just concentrate on a small corner of the garden and then each week move to another corner.'

St Aloysius College has given St Ethnea College in Argentina a music program, complete with an orchestra.

SAC students gave their weekly savings. Parents sent money to me with their children. SAC is now donating money for the barrios. The SAC community has donated a lot of money to this Argentina project.

The other day, SAC had a Can Drive for the homeless men of Adelaide. They raised over 8,000 cans of food for these men.

St Aloysius College is tending their corner of the garden. St Aloysius College is on the other side of the world.

I want this garden, Argentina, to bloom. I want those little children in Comedor Angel who hugged me today to have water in their houses. Clean water, food, medicine and happiness.

Entering the tiger's den today was stupid.

But the garden really is in need of work. Today, Jose, Mirinda and I were working in a corner of the garden – a really scary garden though.

It's time to rest.

Te mando un beso,
Craig

Juan's Story

Some things I can fix. Some things I am still trying.

When I was here a year ago with the St Aloysius College choir, I noticed some blue-eyed girls in our school's touring party catch the attention of some young boys. The boys, like any young teenage boys, collected in the corner and conspiratorially sniggered amongst themselves. I asked one of the St Ethnea girls to find out what the boys were up to. One of the boys liked 'Erin' and wanted to give her a drawing.



Juan and Craig

The smallish boy with the cheeky smile hid behind the others and urged his friend, Jonathon, to give her the drawing. The operation went smoothly and the boy in the shadows laughed nervously. He was full of energy, full of life.

As I was about to move on from this exchange, our accompanying social worker, Josefina, held my arm and told me a story.

'That boy heard your Australian choir was coming. He saw the other children reading a poster on the wall.

Juan can't read but he quickly got a pencil and paper and copied a picture of his Football team's logo. River Plate. The first letters he ever formed were RP for Erin.'

I was touched.

Later that night, I was enjoying dinner with Josefina and others when she told me another story.

'Juan is violently abused by his father. I have never seen him relate to a male as he did with you today.' Juan's mother has had many lovers and each has abused Juan.

That night a mad passion crept into my heart. I felt I had to return to Argentina. I wanted to help kids like Juan. I wanted to offer a positive male presence.

For the next seven months I wrote to many of the St Ethnea College kids and wrote emails directed at Juan. At first, he refused my emails. The St Ethnea girls persisted in translating them.



Home in the barrio

Josefina told the disappointed St Ethnea girls that this was Juan's defence mechanism. She encouraged them to continue reading the emails, assuring them that he would listen. They read them. There were stories about Australia and my son Josh. Silly stories about us playing tennis or soccer. Stories asking about Juan's preference as a soccer forward or defender. The girls read on. When they finished, Juan uttered three simple words. 'Read them again.' They read the stories to Juan about three times that day.

In the next email I introduced myself to Juan formally and asked for his permission to write to him. I wanted to empower him. For the next seven months I wrote little emails to Juan and occasionally, at Josefina's suggestion, to the other children of Comedor Angel.

I arrived back in Argentina in April. The first meetings with Juan were very cautious on his part.

Over the next two months I worked on him, gradually getting to the point where he would sit down next to me, never really participating in the guitar lessons, but offering assistance to the younger kids as my helper.

As Juan suffers from Hepatitis A and is very thin, I began supporting his family with money. His mother had abandoned him and left the kids to fend for themselves. Juan began to lose so much weight as he was not eating on the weekends. He could attend the Comedor (food distribution centre) for his daily meal on weekdays but on the weekends he did not eat. The money SAC had fundraised was put to work by making food available to Juan and the other children in his family for a year.

Then Juan went missing.

On my visits to Comedor Angel we didn't see him for about four weeks and we became concerned. Josefina and I attended his public school and spoke to the Principals and the teacher. We visited his class – classroom 5A. Juan is 13 years old and he is in Year 5.

Juan had been withdrawn from the school by his on/off again mother. Josefina had put pressure on Juan's mother to return to Juan and care for him. Josefina puts pressure on many of the barrios' parents.

Juan was in trouble with the school. There had been confusion over the theft of a wallet. Many felt, with Juan's gentle heart and quiet nature, he was not likely to be involved in the theft. No-one really knows who stole the wallet, but Juan didn't defend himself. He stayed very quiet as the accusations flew.

We talked for many hours about the possibilities for Juan. All agreed that this kid had special qualities. He had fragility. He had a sweet heart and a cheeky smile. We had all been touched by him in some way.

After an extensive meeting (Argentinians love a good chat), we went to visit another problem family – little 6-year-old Rosio's family who are very poor. This is another family that SAC is supporting by having water supplied to the family home.

Rosio is the little girl I have written about, whose mother was not caring for the family after Rosio's older brother was stabbed and killed in a night club. Rosio was occasionally left to care for the little 6-month-old baby.

As we travelled down the terrible streets, both Jose and I screamed out, 'There's Juan!'

Jose, a terrible driver but an inspiration to me, threw the car to a bone-shattering halt. We jumped out like the 70s television cops, Starsky and Hutch and bolted for Juan. He was all smiles and overwhelmed to see us. He appeared to be very happy to see his loco Australian amigo.

I hugged him and kissed him in the traditional Argentinian style on the left-hand side of the cheek and asked how he had been.

I entered the gate and spoke with his brother - his problem brother. Juan's brother bashes him. Juan's brother is 'malo' (bad), a real problem for the San Ambrosio barrio community.

I returned to Juan and suggested a photo. He obliged but as soon as the camera appeared, Juan's smile disappeared. He doesn't like being in the spotlight and doesn't like too much attention. Juan knows that being noticed usually means a bashing and so he prefers to dwell in the shadows.

Juan is a 13-year-old boy who has Hepatitis A. He can't read or write. He lives with a mother who abandons him. His older brother is abusing him and he has lost contact with his school friends. Juan's mother didn't like being pressured by Juan's school principals about the wallet and so now he is at another school. Josefina and I visited his new school and were not impressed with their lack of concern for their students' whereabouts.

What to do to help Juan?

One of our ideas was to introduce him to Luciano, a great priest who runs an excellent barrio project where kids are taught metal work, music, brick making and much more. Perhaps I could organise a Remise (a cheap taxi) to pick him up each weekend and take him to Luciano's. Perhaps he could work alongside Julio, an excellent handyman working on beautifying Comedor Angel which is our parting gift to the Comedor.

If Juan continues living with his brother he is likely to come under his wayward influence. Juan has a soft, gentle heart and a great smile.

Work at Comedor Angel is progressing well. But what to do to help Juan?

Life in the barrios is not easy. Working in the barrios is downright sad.

I hope that Juan's soft, gentle heart and cheeky smile continue to touch the hearts of people like Josefina, the former school's principal and his teacher. I can't fix this problem in the little time I have left here. The boy who has inspired me to work in the barrios. The boy who is largely responsible for me being in Argentina with a passion in my heart.

Say a prayer for Juan.

Te mando un beso grande
Craig

Update
I have had some success with Juan.

Julio, who is carrying out work for me on Comedor Angel, is a man of the barrios. Not Juan's barrio but he understands the workings of the place. He has agreed to let Juan work alongside him and pay him a small amount for his work. 'There is hope in my heart for Juan.'

Casa de Cultura

I am supposed to be in Argentina helping but look at the name we have decided for our new project.

'Casa de Cultura, San Aloysius.' It really is impossible for anyone here to pronounce!


Casa de Cultura

Casa de Cultura, San Aloysius is under way. The three rooms have been named following a competition with over one hundred excellent suggestions from SAC students.

The Bethesda Room of Art, suggested by Courtney in Year 10. Bethesda meaning Mercy in Hebrew – an excellent name Courtney.

The Adelaide Room of Artisania, suggested by Baseira. Well done, Baseira.

The Juan Guarmera Music Room, courtesy of Juan Guarmera – thank you Juan for opening my eyes.

With the help of the Argentine project manager, Maria Aleman, 'we' decided on the name as 'Casa de Cultura, San Aloysius'. I wasn't really going to go for the 'Evans' Jive Joint!' although I was tempted.

Maria writes,

> Obligado is one of the suburbs located in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. It is extremely poor, so much so that people living there survive by picking up other's rubbish from the streets. They also do occasional work, which is never well paid.
>
> Children living in this suburb suffer absolute lack of family love and attention since their parents spend the whole day in the streets. The children are either taken to work with the parents, or they are left in different corners of the barrios, opening taxi doors or asking for money.
>
> These children will grow up without going to school. They will spend their days in the streets, deprived of every care and protection. They will become adults having many years of marginality, making it impossible for them to acquire an education or a working income. They will develop no work ethic and have little idea of hygiene or personal care. They have little chance of entering 'society.
>
> In these often illegally occupied shanty town communities, there are large groups of Latin American immigrants such as Paraguayans, Peruvians and Bolivians, making the social cohesiveness in these communities even more complicated.
>
> Children with very difficult backgrounds are thus dragged along struggling to survive into adolescence. In most cases, drugs and alcohol provide their escape from the very harsh childhood memories of abuse and neglect. Crime is seen as their only option to subsidise these addictions.

So, what is the latest barrio project that SAC donations are helping to fund?



Outside Casa de Cultura

We have established a start-up fund of 2,000 pesos and taken over a largely abandoned house. We intend to provide the youngsters and adolescents living in this suburb a place of their own that will protect them from the perils of being on the streets.

We intend to offer these children the chance to improve their self-esteem by participating in worthwhile learning opportunities.

Through their involvement in art, music, theatre, artisania and recreational activities, these children will not only develop a sense of community but also realize their own gifts and abilities.

We hope that through this centre, these neglected children and young adults will discover their self-worth and seek a productive participation in the wider community.



Inside Casa de Cultura

The first steps have been taken. Today the electricity is being upgraded. Makeshift cables crossing the walls, floors and ceilings were incredibly dangerous. The painting of the interior and exterior is being fast-tracked – 'Australian timetable' has been requested. 'I want it started tomorrow.' 'I want it finished before Mercy Day, 24th September!'

I am trying to be diplomatic but I am running out of time! The next phase of the project is to supply teachers in the various disciplines that will take place in the Centre.

Maria's words,

> We are well aware that the depth of conflict derived from their misery and marginality will not vanish by these activities. But at the same time, we cannot remain motionless while thousands of young children live absolutely hopeless lives and middle-class communities entrench themselves in security compounds so as not to become victims of delinquency.

Poverty alone is terrible. It's worth mobilizing for. I cannot remain idle when children are being emotionally, physically, sexually and psychologically tortured in these horrendously poor communities.

Eight million people are living in shanty towns in Argentina and the government is doing nothing. That's a lot of children living terrible lives. As humans we must do better.

As an Australian living in 'The Lucky Country' I want to do more. On my return I want to organise a meeting to form a working party of teachers, parents and students who wish to lend a hand by adopting and supporting a barrio project. The SAC community has proven itself to be a formidable force in caring for others. I am so proud of the SAC community's spirit of Mercy and I am hopeful that we can take the message to the wider community. At the very least, we could share the Mercy spirit that lives in our hearts.

I hope we can get together to fix a wrong. A wrong against silent victims. A wrong against children. It doesn't matter that it is not 'our' country. There are children suffering and I know them personally. I want to help them. I want to do more for them.

Te mando un beso,
Craig

Comedor Angel

This is the shortest story I will write.

Words cannot explain the emotions I feel when I think about these beautiful children at Comedor Angel.



Children at Comedor Angel



Playground provided by SAC fundraising

Today was our official going away party.

The first part of the project is completed. I will need more funds to complete the next stage which is to insulate the tin roof.

Was this crazy beautiful experience worth it?

Look at the photos and you decide.

Juan, the boy who touched my heart, and with my wonderful son Joshua, played soccer with me today at our going away party.

I know it was worth it. There is always hope for a brighter future. It's all about not accepting that things are impossible. I choose to live my life believing in possibilities.

Te mando un beso,
Craig

Tears for Argentina



The now famous Cup Dance

Many people will visit a tourist destination and take in the popular sites of museums, chapels and art galleries. They may dine out to experience the local food and wine. But they will never really get to know the best of a city or a country. The people.

Visit Argentina and you may learn about:

Maradona – Argentine football legend.
Evita – illegitimate child from the barrios who married a president and became a legend.
Che Guevara – revolutionary.
Carlos Gardel – tango singer, actor and playboy.
Quinquela Martin – famous painter of the port of Buenos Aires (La Boca).
Tango – a passionate Argentine dance that developed in the ports of Buenos Aires.
River Plate and Boca Juniors – two most influential football teams with the most fanatical fans.
Asado – Argentine barbecue.

Mate – a tea shared amongst friends and sipped through a straw.
Dulce de Leche – a sweet crème spread.
Avenida 9 de Julio – largest avenue in the world celebrating the independence of Argentina.
Caminito, La Boca – Italian portside city, famous for its brightly painted buildings.
Cataratas del Iguazu, Misiones – amazing waterfalls.
Perito Moreno – glaciers in the south of Argentina.

But if you think you have learnt all there is to know about Argentina then you will need to pay more attention. The thing that has made my time, and my son Joshua's time, truly worthwhile is the friendships we have made.


Argentinian asado brings friend together

Friendship and family in Argentina are passions.

We leave Argentina celebrating its culture, legends and history, but it will be my dear friends and the memories of time spent with them, that I will treasure.

Friends within the St Ethnea College community and local community.

Friends within the barrios communities.

I leave Argentina not with a memory of poverty, abuse and violence. I leave Argentina with a heartfelt tribute to what Argentinians value most – 'amistad'…. friendship.

'Oh! My beloved Buenos Aires, the moment I see you again, all sadness will be forgotten.' *Carlos Gardel*
Once you visit Argentina you leave a piece of your heart behind.

Thank you, Argentina, for our 5 months.

A beautiful, crazy experience.

'Tango Argentino'

Thanks for reading and experiencing this journey with us.

Te mando un beso,
Craig

PS Thank you to my friend, Carol Grantham, who edited and maintained this site…now it's time to rest.