

## **8 Guatemalans and 1 Mexican Shovel 8” of Snow in Decorah**

Last night I received three different calls from the men – Otto, Luiz, and Juventino – who wanted to be **sure** that I knew they were at our disposal for snow shoveling in the morning. They had heard how much it was supposed to snow, and, as they are ever on the lookout for work, they knew that this could be a big day for them. They didn't want to let any opportunities pass by! We had already lined up 3 or 4 jobs for them: the co-op, the Methodist church, Jean Carter's, and David Vasquez and his neighbors. For them, this would be the work of an hour or two.

You might think I'd be bothered by receiving so many calls. In fact, they were smart to keep after me (and who knows how many others were receiving these calls?), because after their third call, my husband Daniel had the idea that maybe they could go knock on doors in the morning, using a letter of introduction in English that we could provide. It seemed like a good idea, but we live 6 miles out and most certainly would be unable to get to town in the morning, so I would need to find someone else to make the script. It was late by then so I just went to bed and hoped I'd wake up early enough to help make it happen for them.

The phone rang at 6:30 am. That's early for me. It was Juventino, who was with the other 3 shoveling the co-op walkways. They still needed one more shovel, and also they were wondering where to put so much snow! I told them where to find one at Matt Spencer and Randi Berg's house, two blocks from the co-op. They know Randi, because she took the photos that were used in the recent Tapestry article about them, but they hadn't yet been to her house. "La Doctora," they call her, because they learned that she is also a doctor. Also, when we watched the holiday parade on Water St. last Friday night, Matt and Randi's son Kaj was introduced to the men and made friends right away, in the wonderful way that Kaj does!

I waited until about 7:30am, then called Randi to see if she would type out and print the letter for them, basically saying "*we are guests in this town from Guatemala, and we are would like to be hired to shovel your walk. You can write checks to First Lutheran Church...*" etc. I talked with Matt too, who was out shoveling and told me that he was NOT missing a shovel. Thus did I discover that the men had borrowed a shovel from the wrong house! Anyway, by now it was clear that the Spencer-Berg household had joined the morning team that was facilitating this day of work for our guests. How many times have Matt and Randi dropped everything to help friends and strangers? We'll never be able to count, but I'm sure they recognized as we all do these days that there's something extra-special about this particular opportunity.

Luckily, a few of the men have cell phones. All morning as we communicated, me in my jammies by the woodstove in the dim light of dawn and them out in the cold gladly working and earning money, I could hear over the phone the sound of shovels cutting into deep snow, and sliding off, and digging in again.

I told them to go to Matt and Randi's to pick up the letters soliciting work. When they got there Matt handed his shoveling job over to them, and then he walked around the neighborhood to solicit other jobs. Iverson's, Blue Heron Knittery, Weises...Later I heard that they also shoveled at First Lutheran and other places as well. It was a great day for earning a bit of money for tortillas or cement blocks or school fees.

PS – The shovel which had been accidentally taken from an unknown address was later returned. Juventino asked me to go to the house and apologize on their behalf, but I haven't yet learned where it is.