

# 'Your Little Family Will Be Home'

Photo By Marshall Dussinger



This, the International Year of the Family, will be an especially meaningful year for (left to right) Betty Rutt, Joe, Angela and Maryanne Sharp, Ira Rutt and (in front) Joel Sharp. Thanks to the caring "of people in high places," the family will be together — something which, until just recently, they feared impossible.

By Peggy Schmidt  
Sunday News Staff Writer

Exit. International Year of the Child. Enter. International Year of the Family. Both designations have a special meaning for the Rev. and Mrs. Joseph Sharp, who have recently returned to Lancaster County after three years in Ecuador.

The Sharps have completed a term as missionaries under the auspices of the Gospel Missionary Union, and look forward to a year's furlough. Previously, they had served two four year terms with furloughs of seven months. The usual arrangements for coming home, this time, were more complicated than in times past — because the Sharps are now the parents of an Ecuadorian child, their adopted daughter, Angela. Bringing Angela into the United States in time for Christmas seemed, for a while, to be The Impossible Dream.

It was two years ago last Wednesday that Maryanne Sharp first held the 24½ hour old Angela Lucia in her arms. An hour later, Joe and Maryanne took the baby home.

"There were no difficulties with the actual adoption proceedings," said Maryanne. "We needed permission from the Mission and from the authorities in Ecuador, and had no problems whatsoever with that end."

Difficulties arose when Joe and Maryanne, ready to return to Lancaster with their son Joel, tried to obtain a visa for Angela. A resident's visa was necessary, rather than a visitor's visa, because Angela's stay in the States would be a long one, and because she will one day be naturalized.

Immigration officials required a home study of the Sharps, conducted by a state recognized adoption agency. It was not possible to provide this through the Ecuadorian system, because adoptions are handled entirely through the juvenile courts, and all studies are strictly confidential.

"We contacted Mrs. Emily Mast at the Family and Children's Service," Maryanne said, "because she had handled Joel's adoption for us in 1971. We asked her if it was possible to do an update on the original home study. Permission was given for that, and this was done in October."

According to the Sharps, the entire procedure should have been finished and the results sent to Guayaquile in a short time. However, first, a copy of the home study had to go to immigration headquarters in Miami, Fla., for approval of the visa. Between Lancaster and Miami, the home study apparently was lost.

Joe Sharp remembered, "Permission was not arriving in Guayaquile. We called Miami and they said they didn't receive the home study."

With nothing arriving in Guayaquile or Miami, Joe called Maryanne's mother, Mrs. Betty Rutt, who lives in Lititz. It was at this point — the first week in December — that Mrs. Rutt began her telephone marathon.

"I called Mrs. Mast," recalled Betty, "and found that, fortunately, she had sent a duplicate copy of the home study to Harrisburg. She contacted Harrisburg and asked them to send their copy down on the seventh of December. . . but that copy had not arrived by the eleventh. I called Mrs. Mast again, and she said that at that late date, she didn't know what could be done, but suggested I contact Rep. Bob Walker's office in Lancaster."

Betty talked to Mrs. Strickler at Walker's office at 9 a.m. on Dec. 12. "I hung up feeling disappointed, because she didn't know what could be done — it was getting so late," said Betty. "Was I surprised when at 10 a.m. I received a call from Dele Terry at Rep. Walker's office in Washington. She asked me to tell her my story briefly. Then she called me back three or four times during the morning to reassure me that they were working on the situation. She kept reassuring me, 'Your little family will be home'."

"Dele was tops. She did everything for us. She had called Miami and asked if someone from Guayaquile would call her, as she couldn't reach anyone there. So we tried to get in touch with Joe to have someone down there call Miami."

It was about this time that, according to Maryanne Sharp, "the hand of the Lord became obvious." Joe and Maryanne live in Shell, Ecuador, about a 5½ hour drive from the Mission headquarters in Quito. Yet, just as Betty Rutt called Quito to ask them to get a message to Joe, he walked through the door of the Mission office.

More phone calls followed — to Quayaquile, to Miami, to Lititz.

Dele Terry managed to reach the American Consulate General in Quayaquile, Robert Bishton, and had received two cables from him regarding the case. Bishton declared, "That family will be home for Christmas," and Joe soon found himself on a plane from Quito to Quayaquile, where he picked up the visa and returned.

Joe recalled, "It was the afternoon of Friday, Dec. 14, when I returned to Quito to deliver the papers to our lawyer. It was the last day possible to have Angela's visa ready by the 19th, which is the date we had reserved for the trip home."

Betty Rutt claimed, "That was a Friday — yet on Tuesday, when we had talked to Miami, they told us it was totally impossible; that it would take two or three weeks (to get Angela into the United States)."

Maryanne added, "Mother started talking to Rep. Walker's office on Wednesday, and Joe walked out Friday with the papers in his hand. The fact that Joe walked into the office in Quito in time to get that call from Mother, and the fact that so much was approved by phone — that's an unheard of thing — it had to be the Lord's hand in it."

Maryanne's father, Ira Rutt, claimed that people should know, especially in these times, when feelings toward government and government officials tend to be negative, that "People were upset about our predicament. People in high places do care."

The final result of the endless letters, telephone calls, and "hundreds of people praying," was that little Angela, her brother Joel and her parents were able to take part in a real family reunion during the holidays. Grandma and Grandpa Rutt welcomed their other daughter and son-in-law, the Rev. and Mrs. Arthur Sprunger, and their child, from Ohio, to join the festivities with the three Rutt sons, Jeff (and his wife), East Petersburg, and Dale and Doug, at home.

Joe and Maryanne Sharp, whose mission in Ecuador was to "train native leaders in scriptural doctrine so they may in turn lead their own churches," will live at 1660 Sunset Ave., not far from their home church, Calvary Independent. They plan to spend some of their year's furlough studying; perhaps taking some courses at Lancaster Bible College (from which they both graduated); working part-time. But most of all, they will be celebrating the "Year of the Family" by enjoying theirs. . . together.