

**THE ONLY RATIONAL WAY OF EDUCATING IS TO BE AN EXAMPLE**  
-ALBERT EINSTEIN

Greetings from Hayastan!

One year has passed since we left San Jose and flew to Philadelphia to embark on this wonderful adventure. Our time in Mineral, California seems so long ago and a world away. Next week, the next group of volunteers will arrive from Philadelphia with the same excitement and ignorance we had when we first stepped off the plane. We look forward to the fresh faces and personalities.

This last year we have had the joy of learning so much from our Armenian friends as well as having the opportunity to share many experiences with them. One year ago, we didn't know any Armenians or much about this region of the world. We have come a long way from those days and look forward to this next year to continue this personal growth in our lives. In the next year, we have so much we want to accomplish that sometimes it feels as if there won't be enough time. It will be busy with larger projects and more focused daily activities.

As we have mentioned many times, our Armenian friends have made our time here so enjoyable. If we try to simplify why we are volunteering our time with the United States Peace Corps then this is it. It's about getting to know people on a personal level, which can only be achieved when you integrate into a culture. Since many of you are reading this from the United States and won't get a chance to meet our friends, we want to spend a little time in each newsletter to introduce our friends to you.



Saturday afternoon in the garden

This is Gohar and her family...well, most of them. It's difficult to get a photo of everyone since they are a very busy family. Gohar is on the left in this picture and she is our Armenian tutor. She, her husband, and children live in the same building as ours. On her left is her mom and her dad is next to me. The boy in the middle is Arson and on his lap is Zhana. Arson, 18 years old, attends Yerevan University and we only see him during winter and summer break. He is studying to be an economist. Zhana is 5 years old, loves to talk, play outside, and, in general, be the center of attention. Gohar's parents are retired. Her mom works at home, helps take care of Zhana, and tends to her small garden. Her father spends just about everyday in their large garden (where this photograph was taken). They grow many types of fruits and vegetables. Gohar's husband is Vacho and

he is rarely around. He works about three hours away with the border patrol. He comes home every 3 to 7 days for one or two nights and leaves again. He is a very funny person. Dima, 13 years old, is her other son and attends the school we are teaching at. He loves to play the dooduk (Armenian wind instrument), soccer, and watch movies. All her children are very talented and intelligent. Gohar works a full-time job in Alaverdi while raising her children. Many evenings are spent with her and her children laughing, playing UNO, listening to music, and socializing.

A couple weekends ago we had the pleasure of seeing their garden. Many families have gardens, though it seems to be the grandparents who take care of them on a daily basis. The gardens are laid out between apartment buildings and on the outer edges of the town. Due to the size of this one, it was on the hillside above our town. We spent the afternoon in the position that you see in the photograph. We laid out on a bed mattress pulled from their house in the garden. We listened to birds sing, watched insects, ate lots of fresh veggies, bread, and cheese, and relaxed. I photographed some of the garden, and Laura and Gohar helped Zhana with her Armenian activity books. Only when the clouds decided to take away our warm afternoon sun did we pack up and head back home.

The computer lessons have been going great with the children. I have been working with five students in the last week. I meet with them on an individual basis at our home. Ashot, a sixth grade boy, has been learning computers this year from the school computer teacher. One of his first questions with me was how he could password protect his documents. He

didn't want everyone reading his work on the public shared computers. The other four children are slowly working on how to use a computer mouse, set up a folder, and the basics of Word. Riveta, a sixth grade girl that lives in our apartment building, has enjoyed working with the many different fonts and colors that Word offers. She has been practicing typing her English and finds it much easier to type than Armenian. In the future, I hope to teach PowerPoint, Excel and the basics of Photoshop. My main motivation for helping the children learn computers is so that they will continue to communicate with us when we leave next year.

### ARMENIAN RECIPES

If you would like to be a little adventurous and try some of the foods we are eating here, then try this recipe. This traditional dish is generally served for special occasions.

#### DOLMA

Grape leaves, cabbage leaves, or vegetables

- 1 kg ground beef
- 4 big onions, chopped
- 1 t red pepper paste
- 1 T tomato paste
- 300 grams butter, cut small
- 2 C fresh herbs, chopped
- pinch of salt
- ¼ C dried cilantro
- 1 ½ C rice, uncooked

1. If using grape leaves, use canned grape leaves. If using cabbage, boil if first to soften, then peel off the leaves.
2. Combine everything except wrapping material to make a fine mixture. Roll a small amount of mixture into the leaves or stuff the vegetables.
3. Line the bottom of a large pot with dolma; invert a plate over the dolma; cover the dolma with about 2 inches of water above and boil until the water boils down to the level of the dolma. Serve with garlic and yogurt; makes 50-70

A couple weeks ago, Laura put a request in with our school director for her own classroom and she received it. The school director granted her permission to use a vacant 15'x15' room, which is perfect for her English clubs. With \$30 from our pocket and a lot of physical labor from our school carpenter, the room is being transformed wonderfully. We offered our help on numerous occasions, but were refused each time. He'll definitely get a big batch of chocolate chip cookies for his excellent commitment to helping us. In the last week, he has managed to patch up the holes in the walls, paint the room, blackboard, door and desks; and install four new windows and a ceiling light. We look forward to sending pictures (before and after) once everything is officially completed.



## Laura's Column

Hello friends and family, I hope all is going well. I have been thinking lately about a conversation I had with my grandparents while we were home on vacation. My grandpa asked Brett and me a question concerning whether we think we are making a difference here in Armenia. We fiddled around the question for a while and our response was weak. Well, I have a much better response for my grandpa and everyone else reading this newsletter now.

Brett and I had the unique experience of being away from our site long enough to see the slight impact we had on the community. On two separate occasions, students wrote in their English journals that they enjoy learning from Brett and me because we talk about interesting things. The numbers in our clubs are still high and the director of the school has recognized the value of us being here. On a daily basis, I visit with our neighbors, drink coffee and share about our cultures. An English classroom and library is being painted, fixed up, and decorated with the help of different community members. This small town on the other side of the world wants to see its' students learn and grow in this current changing world.

Another volunteer who lives near us received a grant to build a new playground. It is amazing to see how many children come from all over our town to play on the new swings and go down the slide. We are seeing first hand our affect on this small community.

We are making a difference here. Sometimes it is very small, like a conversation about cultural differences. Sometimes, on the other hand, it is something very big like a student understanding the value of learning English. Peace Corps is not what I thought is would be originally. In fact, my heart aches at times because of the poverty and hopelessness I see. Yet, at other times, I am overcome with happiness because I see the potential of each child in creating a better future for their country. I can imagine them providing a more financially secure life for their own children. I also hope that this new generation will demand their government be more responsible and provide healthier living standards.



Gohar, Laura, and Riveta – 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls



Laura and Lilit

While living in Armenia, it has become apparent to me that people can adapt to just about anything. Armenians have experienced so much sadness in their recent history. Poverty is apparent in everyday life. It is shocking to see the heating system in the school that no longer works. The plumbing and pipes leading to the apartment buildings that leak throughout the town that once worked. The sewage that flows into the river and in the same glance you can see the broken down sewage treatment plant. However, people adapt. Sometimes I wonder if America would look like Armenia, if suddenly we lost our financial security, had a huge natural disaster and all the smartest and most successful Americans moved to more prosperous countries. In this same way, Brett and I hope that the Armenia children will listen to some of the ideas we share, encourage change in their communities and, as they grow, will create a different future.

I respect that my grandpa, family and friends are concerned about Brett and my safety and health. What can I say to put you at ease? What we are doing feels right in my heart. Somehow, I wish I could communicate how good it feels to give what you can, to people who need your help, even if they might not realize the value of what you are sharing. With that said, I feel like I am gaining far more from these new friends and students than I will ever share with them. I have received an experience of a lifetime living and working here in Armenia.

Thank you grandpa for making me think about what differences Brett and I are making in this small corner of the world. I love you. Brett and I often think about our family and friends. We hope you are all happy and healthy.



## ARMENIAN VOCABULARY

Would you like to amaze your friends by speaking and/or writing Armenian? If so, then enjoy sharing these phrases with them.

Cowboys are from Texas. - կովարածները Տեխասից են – kovaratsnjer tehasets en

I am not English, I am an American - ես անգլիացի չեմ, ես ամերիկացի եմ – yes chim angleatse, yes amerikatse im

I like big dogs. - ես սիրում եմ մեծ շներ – yes serum em mets shuner

Yes, my feet are pretty. - Այո, իմ ոտքերը սիրուն են – iyo, im votkyera sirun in

Do you smell something? – Հոտ առնո՞ւմ եք որևէ բանից – hoat arnum ek voreva ban

Thanks for taking the time to read about our experiences in Armenia. We look forward hearing back from everyone when you have time to write us. We still appreciate regular mail through the post office if you choose to mail us. We will be in touch soon.

Sincerely,

Brett and Laura



When the electric shaver breaks in the middle of a haircut, thank goodness for Mach 3 shavers.