

 **Կերպարան** 
The Peace Corps Armenia Experiences of Brett and Laura Holt

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We can do no great things, only small things with great love. -Mother Teresa

Greetings from Hayastan!

My mother and brother Mark arrive tomorrow. We are very excited about their arrival to Armenia. This is the first and, possibly, only time we will be able to show our family what life is like in Armenia. It will be filled with 8 days of seeing our town, visiting our host family in Dilijan, and visiting Yerevan and the surrounding area. At the end of their Armenia visit, we will all fly to Istanbul and visit Turkey for a week. Many volunteers and friends back in the states have had so many good things to say about Turkey. We look forward to sharing those experiences with you in the next newsletter.



Views from Arches Village in northern Armenia



Araveek, Mher, Laura, Anna and Anaheet

June has been filled with lots of work. We're busier now than when school was session. This is because we are able to occupy time that was normally for school lessons. With all of this work, we don't have much time for ourselves. I think we drove ourselves to exhaustion a couple weeks ago when we were sick for 3 days. It was not a good time and made us stop to make sure we leave some time for ourselves, despite our best intentions.

The three boys that attended B.R.O. (Boys Reaching Out) Camp had a great time. They were able to meet many other boys from around Armenia and learn many new life skills. Prior to the boys attending the camp, the school director wanted to make it known to everyone that she had three boys from her school attending this camp. She contacted our local television studio and got them in touch with me. I did a short interview about the camp and why it was only for boys and who Laura and I are and why we are in Armenia. The interviewer spoke English and, on two occasions, visited U.C. Davis in California for journalism training. We hope to continue to use the television studio to further educate people. In the process, Laura and I found an interest from girls who wanted to attend the girl's camp called G.L.O.W. (Girls Leading Our World). Seven have been selected to go in July.

In this newsletter, we want to introduce you to Mher and his family. They are a very nice family who has fallen on some hard times. Mher, the oldest child, is 14 years old and comes to our clubs. When he is available, he will run with us in the mornings. He has an amazing singing voice that he enjoys to display. Anna, 10 years old, is going to be in the 4th grade. She is loves to laugh and smile all the time. Anaheet, 33 years old, is their mother and is jobless. Araveek is their grandmother and worked for many years at the Copper Factory. Currently, Mher and her sell ice cream on Tuesdays at a large outdoor market located an hour and half from here. It's allows them to earn an extra 5 or 6 dollars each month. Their financial situation is one of the worst we have seen in Armenia. They have a running tab at a store so that they can purchase food each week. The father left the family 10 years ago and has not been in contact since leaving. Despite their situation, they are in good spirits and remain optimistic. Currently, the

family is waiting for Anaheet's sister and her husband in Russia to send some money so the entire family will be able to move to Russia. They think that sometime in the fall the money will be sent. In Russia Mher will most likely not continue his education, but instead will get a job to help the family. We are trying to encourage him to at least continue to read books and pursue some sort of education.

Last weekend we had the chance to go with them to Arches Village. This is Anaheet's sister's husband's village and a few times a year the family will go and take care of the house and garden. It is located about an hour northeast of here and is nestled in the hills overlooking a beautiful valley. We spent our time picking cherries from their garden, picking a plant called Oots in the nearby hills, playing cards game (UNO, Go Fish, Old Maid), and reading books. Oots is a very popular plant to pick this time of year and is used for tea. While at the village, we had the strange encounter of meeting a couple of Armenians who had never met an American. They wouldn't talk with us but would ask questions to our friends who would then ask us the question. We would answer to these Armenians but that didn't stop them from asking more questions to our friends instead of just asking us. All of this was in Armenian and was a little frustrating. The rain kept us inside most of the time, but allowed for a lot of time for conversation and getting to know each other a lot better. The family would like us to come again in August.

ARMENIAN RECIPES

We stomached this dish once. Do you dare? This dish is usually served on the holidays or for a special occasion.

KHASH

4 calves hooves
6 lamb tongues
1 bottle of vodka
1 kg calves' tripe
2 garlic cloves
paprika
salt and pepper

It is best to buy feet already cleaned, if possible. Otherwise soak the feet in boiling water to loosen the shoe, then take off the shoe from each foot. Singe all hairs and scrape off the rest with the edge of a knife. Wash everything very thoroughly. Soak the feet and stomach in water overnight. Each ingredient has to be cooked separately at first. In a big kettle, start cooking the feet with the garlic. Cut stomach into one-inch squares, cook 10 minutes, drain the water. Add fresh water and cook 15 minutes more. Then add to the feet and cook together for 2 hours. When meat separates from foot bones, remove all bones. Also take off scum when formed. Cook tongues in water until skins can be pulled off easily. Cut up into small pieces. When the feet and stomach are half cooked, add the pieces of tongue, and the salt and pepper. When khash is cooked, take off some of the fat and put it into a small frying pan; add the paprika and cook a few seconds until paprika is dissolved; then pour back into the khash. Serve the meat with its own broth in soup bowls. Add lemon juice or vinegar (and lots o' vodka!) when eating.



Laura's Column

Hello Family and Friends!

Boy, do I ever have some good news for you in this newsletter! The English classroom and library have been completed and are in working condition. Currently, we have about 75 books that are coming and going each day. The students not only enjoy reading the stories but looking at the pictures. We have geography, history, science, environmental and many fiction books. There are also different levels of books from beginner, with mostly pictures, to short chapter books. I never could have imaged how popular these books would be. On several occasions I have had students call our house or just stop by to see if the book they want has been returned. The classroom has also been a success. The numbers of students attending has stayed about the same. Depending on the lesson, one to nine students come to learn English. Yesterday, I had two students call and ask if I could



Before and after photos of the classroom



come to the school in a half hour to have a lesson. I said, "sure" and quickly prepared a lesson to teach. When I arrived, I had a class full of 5th grade students. I feel a sense of comfort knowing that if the students want to learn English all they have to do is call our house.

The school let Brett and me hang visual aides on the walls and hang the students' work. Every once in awhile, a teacher or janitor will come into the classroom, ask a few questions and just look around the room. Windows were replaced, the desks, the walls, the ceiling and the doors were spackled or sanded and painted. A new lock was put on the door, a bookshelf was moved into the room and a little plant shelf was added. Curtains were hung and the chalkboard was fixed up. Wow! This was a joint effort by the school and us. Many books were donated by Darien Books in the states. The total cost on our part was \$48/20,000 dram and the total labor hours were about 40.

Overall, this has been a positive change in the school. I am a little concerned about what the next year will bring. The Armenia teacher I have been assigned to work with has stopped communicating with me for reasons unknown to me. Next school year I hope we are able to work together. I am slowly learning, if a person doesn't want to change or listen, it is better to accept the situation. I will continue to focus my attention on the students because we bring each other the most joy.



I have one last thing I would like to say before control of the computer is given back to Brett. Today, I am making apricot jam. Apricots are very cheap right now. They are about 30 cents for about 2 pounds. Brett and I have been buying pounds of apricots and eating them like crazy. If you take the seed from the apricot and



open it with a hammer there is a little nut inside. The nuts are pretty good after they have been dried and toasted. It's fun working in the kitchen and making jam but I just never realized how long it would take. I might suggest making apricot jam instead of Brett's idea of khash.

You all are in my thoughts and I hope life is treating you well.

We will continue to pursue more projects that affect the children in this next year and hope to share with you, or involve you in some way, the transformations that take place. We are still looking at a variety of ways to help refurbish the last three playgrounds in our town and to bring some computers from America to schools in our area to enhance the computer training programs that are already in place.

Thanks again for reading our newsletter. We look forward to hearing back from you. We're a bit slow on returning emails these days and we apologize. We will work on it. Take care and have safe travels this summer!

Sincerely,

Brett and Laura



Our outhouse in Arches Village
