



# Կեր ու Սոս



The Peace Corps Armenia Newsletter of Brett and Laura Holt

Volume 1 Number 16

May 20, 2005

## THE GREATEST RISK IS TO RISK NOTHING AT ALL

Greetings from Hayastan!

Welcome to our new and improved email format. All future emails will be in this format thanks to the wonderful feedback from our last email. The title of our newsletter is "Eat and Shut Up" and is pronounced "Ker oo Soos". It is often heard at the dinner table when kids are running around rather than sitting and eating. Go ahead, use it at the next family meal.

We have been doing quite well. Working hard or hardly working at all, depending on the day. We plan things out but anticipate that they may not come through. It's ok. We roll with the punches. We had some friends come over for dinner last night. We served up a lemon pasta dish, followed up with ice cream and we finished with the movie "Big Fish".



This last weekend we were in Yerevan to drop off BRO Camp applications and to attend an Eco Camp training. BRO camp is a boys' camp for children ages 12-18. The camp is designed to teach boys to be leaders in their communities and families. Respect for one another is a key lesson taught. There are only 25 total spots and we had 31 boys apply from our school alone. We're not sure how many throughout Armenia will apply for this camp but we hope to have a couple of our boys attend. Eco camp training allowed all the counselors to get together to

learn the games and the different environmental subjects that will be taught this summer. We plan to work at two camps this summer. Also, this weekend we had the chance to vote for our favorite Earth Day poster. Peace Corps sponsored an environmental drawing contest for all the children that we work with. We have included a photo of the winner.



Our first social event back from the states occurred in mid-May when we traveled south to the area of Vaik. Thirty-eight volunteers came together for the first annual Khash Bowl. It was the north versus the south in flag football. Flags were cut from a shower plastic curtain. It was a very enjoyable game as I helped referee and Laura helped lead the north to victory over the south, 42-35. Local Armenian men and boys watched the first half, but weren't quite interested for the second 45 minute half. After the game, everyone gathered in a nearby village for some bbq'n, sightseeing, and socializing late into the night. We were very tired from our three days of non-stop traveling and socializing.



During our visit to the states, we picked up quite a few gifts for our Armenian friends. Some had asked for certain items, such as beauty supplies and pants, while others were not expecting gifts. The physics teacher, Samvel, had asked us to bring back a lighter for him. He was a collector of lighters from around the world and didn't have one from the states. Samvel

was the teacher you always found smoking during class breaks and willing strike up a conversation with you, whether it was about smoking and drinking or vice versa. Nonetheless, they were funny conversations. After many hours spent searching for a lighter, we



### Laura's Wisdom

Hello family and friends! After our last email, we received several suggestions and one was for me to add a little to the newsletter. Well, here it is!

It is nice to be back in Armenia where the women hold nothing back. I have been informed that my new haircut looks nice but I should definitely not put it back in clips and maybe I should consider getting a trim soon. I am also much fatter now than before we went to America and when I wear makeup I am much prettier. I am slowly accepting this critical assessment of myself from near strangers. After all, they have good intentions. If I look my best, I will keep Brett happy and if I keep Brett happy, we will soon be having an Armenian baby. It is lucky for me that these women have my life more figured out than I do.

Overall, I am feeling content and at home here in Armenia. More than anything this summer, I am looking forward to getting to know the young women that I'm teaching and feed them hope for the future. My goal is to lower my expectations and enjoy the simplicity of life.

-With Love

had found a butane lighter with an eagle and American flag on it. We thought he would have liked this one. When we returned to our school a month ago, we were excited to give this to him. We were thinking he probably thought we forgot about him, especially being gone for so long. We were informed that Samvel had passed away in March from heart failure. We were upset to hear about this loss. His wife is the chemistry teacher and we passed on the lighter to her. She was very thankful that we had remembered him. She said she would give it to their son as a way to remember his father.



In the last few weeks, we have attended three end of the year programs. First, we saw a dance and singing program put on by the dance and singing club at our school. It was a wonderful presentation of modern and traditional Armenian dancing along with some great talent being showcased. Last week, we saw the students who take Russian put on a presentation of Russian literature, dance, and song. We had no idea what was being said but, nonetheless, we were very impressed with the memorization of literature passages. This week we saw the 7<sup>th</sup> grade class compete in a variety of home economic skills. The boys would do skits in between the girl's different competitions. The categories were drawing, cake decorating, singing, needlepoint, craft making, flower arrangements, and fashion design. It was a great display of friendly competition. The auditorium was packed with students and teachers, each rooting for their favorite.



Along with the different after school presentations, we have been able to observe the English class presentations of what the children have been learning throughout the year. Last week, we observed the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class presentation. They presented different songs and skits about the English alphabet, days of the week, weather, and many other subjects. They performed the "The Three Little Pigs" skits, all to the delight of the teachers and parents.

Our summer is looking to be quite a busy time for us. We plan to continue our clubs throughout the summer. The children are very pleased that we will since there isn't a

lot to do around here. The school will remain open in the summer so we will be able to use the classrooms. Along with our clubs, we hope to work at two eco camps. We had planned to have a camp in town but, because of our long hiatus in the states, we have lost support that we were depending on. We will have to try again next year. We will have some family visiting in July for a week and then we will join them for a week along the coast of Turkey. We are very excited to have visitors from the states. Planning for the next school year will continue in the summer. I will be working at local organization to help them develop a hiking guide for the area. I will primarily be hiking different routes, writing descriptions, and taking photos for the publication. Laura and I will also be participating in a couple multi-day backpacking trips with other volunteers. The A13 Peace Corps volunteers arrive in June and we may join in some training for them. There will be plenty for us to do this summer despite school not being in session.



## PROJECT LIST

As a Peace Corps volunteer, we do more than just teach the children about English or the environment. To stay busy throughout the year, we have our hands in a variety of projects. Most of these are on an on-going basis while some would be nice to initiate during our time in Armenia.

**Established English Classroom:** Laura is in the planning stages of establishing a permanent English classroom at the school. Currently, teachers don't have their own classrooms. This makes it difficult to have permanent visual aides in a classroom. Laura plans to write a grant that will give her the money to paint, purchase a rug, English texts, visual aides, as well as many other valuable teaching resources.



**Biology Visual Aides:** This project is set up to assist the biology department in obtaining current and effective visual aides to teach the children. Research on the internet and digital photos of local flora and fauna has been proven effective. A letter writing campaign to various book donation groups will hopefully prove to be successful. The books that are used with clear and effective biology photos are limited, as well as only available for teacher use, not for the children.

**Sarahart Playground Restoration:** Another PCV began this project by raising funds from the United States to fix three playground/soccer field areas in our area. The funds were able

to pay for new playground equipment, repair walls, build fences, labor costs, and repave the soccer field (we don't have grass soccer fields in our town). We have noticed a huge difference in the playground in front of our apartment. We hope to continue this work by finishing the four others playground areas in our area.

**Environmental Education (EE) Peace Corps Volunteer CD Project:** While this project is organized by Brett, it is a group effort from all the current EE volunteers. We are developing a CD to distribute to the new EE volunteers that will allow them to be current on Peace Corps EE projects, as well as other relevant information. The categories include photos, E-books, website and NGO resource lists, documents, project lists, lesson plans, poster contest information, eco camp information, and hiking maps. This project will be completed June 10.

**Alaverdi Hiking Guide:** Brett is assisting a local business and tourism NGO with the development of a hiking guide. The guide will be sold by the NGO to help ensure sustainability of the NGO. Currently, this project is in the planning stages but we hope to have it moving forward this summer. Brett's role will include photo documentation of the local flora and fauna, hiking descriptions, and English text editing.

Thanks again for reading our newsletter. Please feel free to contact us about anything you have read or just to let us know how you are doing. We have added the Armenian language version of our address if you want to try your hand at it. Don't forget to still use the English version, otherwise the mail will never leave the country. We should have new pictures on our website soon so please visit. We always appreciate hearing back from you.

Enjoying life in Armenia,

Brett and Laura Holt  
A12 Peace Corps Armenia



January 2005 Hike to Mt. Lalvar