



## Hello from Lake Sevan—Oct. 10, 2005

A land-locked country in the Caucasus Mountain region, most of Armenia reminds me of the front range of Colorado, the high plateau area of Wyoming or eastern Montana. It's arid and many of the mountain sides are brown this time of year. However, the farther north you travel towards the border with the Republic of Georgia, the greener it gets until you can actually believe you're back in a Wisconsin forest.



The most significant body of water within Armenia is its beloved Lake Sevan in the Gegharkunik marz (province or state). According to the June 2004 Armenia Social Trends report on "Human Poverty in the Regions of RA," Gegharkunik is an agricultural marz. It's also home to the UMCOR demonstration farm projects (see last week's story about the orphanage's trip to the farms) in the Martuni area. Both its rural and urban residents own agricultural land.

Twice this past weekend, I had an opportunity to visit Lake Sevan. On Saturday, I went with fourth year students from the Agribusiness Teaching Center, a department within the Armenian Agricultural Academy and led by Dr. Daniel Dunn, a Wisconsin native under contract with Texas A&M. Dr. Dunn and I drove in his Ford Explorer and he surprised me with a Styrofoam cup filled with cappuccino and one chocolate-glazed, raised donut—both from the only fast food restaurant in Armenia, Yum Yum Donuts. I was in the mood for a bit of pampering and relished the luxurious items as though they were steak and lobster!



*Dr. Daniel Dunn (right) in the warm guys' galley.*

The students rode in a nice bus.



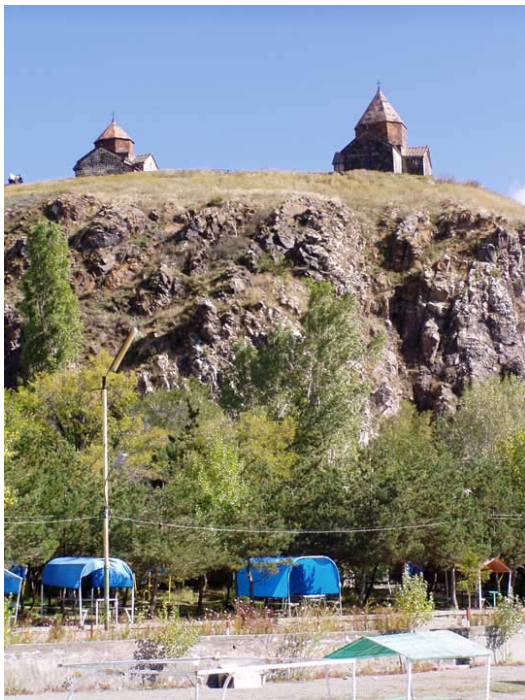
*And the girls under blue tarp onboard.*

As often happens in Armenia, the day didn't really happen according to the initial itinerary. However, once we found the right boat (Armenian President Kocharyan took the boat we were originally going to use) and the cooked fish were aboard, we actually got to ride around the northern end of the lake. It was wonderful.

Aboard was one of the other ATC teachers who is world-renown for her knowledge of and experience in climate changes. We also had a man from the Armenian "department of natural resources." She and I talked about

the Kyoto agreement, changing climates, pollution reduction measures in Armenia and across the region, renewable energy efforts with solar power and manure digesters in some marzes, wastewater treatment projects, sustainable development and even the Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development Council on which I represent Sauk County. She was so intelligent and experienced, yet we talked effortlessly and simply. I enjoyed it immensely.

The lake level, as of 2003, was 1,897 meters. This year, I noticed that it's a bit higher than during my 2004 visit and people confirm they're trying to raise the water level since it is Armenia's major source of water (which comes from the surrounding mountain thaws as well as some springs). The lake surface is just over 1,246 square kilometers. It's bigger than Devil's Lake. In fact, I think you'd need a good 10 Devil's Lakes to match Lake Sevan's size. But, someone else can look up that detail for me. ☺



*The two island churches. For perspective, notice the people on the far left.*

First, we visited the churches on the island, which isn't really an island anymore because the lake level had fallen during the past couple decades. Then we shopped for fish in the small city of Sevan, where I felt like an American with a camera created a bigger stir than a politician with a police escort. With the shopping done, we drove just a few kilometers to the other side of the north end of the lake to

During the boat ride, we ate fish and learned about the lake. We saw wonderful views and basked in the cold breezes, yet warm sun. It was very freeing.

On Sunday, I promised a couple of my own Public Speaking students that I would go to Lake Sevan with them. I am so happy that I made the second trip with Tigran Ghulinyan and David Babayan, along with David's mother!

We visited several churches around the lake as well as a monument. More importantly, we spent the hour drive up and back speaking English, something Tico and Davo need to practice, practice, and practice every day. Even more spectacular than the views from atop the high hillsides by the churches was the wonderful hospitality shown to me by Davo's mother, uncle, aunt and two cousins.



*Tigran (left) and David with his mother atop church hill.*





*I think splitting the gut of the fish proves how fresh it is.*

soup I've had yet while Davo, Tico and I walked down the balcony—back porch—steps and immediately into the barnyard. (Part of the farm facilities are located right under the house, next to the toilet, while the larger barn is adjacent to the older house.) In the barnyard and field, we climbed a small knoll to look out over the entire village, Lake Sevan and the mountains. The air was chilly and clean. The sun bright. The water a wonderful blue and the billowy clouds were joined by others

the rural village of Ch'ka Lofka (loosely translated means “no hunting fish.”) In the village, we pulled into the tiny courtyard of Davo's uncle's house—the home of his late grandparents.

Nearly on top of and surrounding the two-car courtyard was the original house and a newer house. Newer, as in 40 years or so, I'm guessing. We stayed in the newer house while Davo's aunt and mother went to the older house to cook up the tastiest vegetable beef



*David's cousin in the new house.*

Both died in 1998—he was 76 and she was 75.

that seemed to just be boiling over the far mountain range.



*David and Tigran*

We split our eating into two sittings. The soup, homemade lavash (bread like big flour tortillas), homemade cheese, homemade tan (milk, water and salt) and fruits were nourishing. When we returned from another church and monument visit, we stopped by the gravesite of Davo's grandparents and other friends. Tico and I stood back from the family, to give them their time to kiss the monuments and remember, honor, their lives.

So far, it always seems that, right about the time you think the eating is over, it's always time for fish. So we returned home to eat the fish (boiled), more lavash, the rest of our onion/cucumber/tomato with salt salad, some more cheese and another glass of tan. And, of course, another shot of vodka.

Sated and happy with a beautiful day in the country, Davo loaded us up for the drive home, but not before his aunt and uncle loaded up the car with apples and pears, farm fresh eggs and milk still warm from the cow. In fact, one of the soda pop liters of milk was for me and I will enjoy it after I pasteurize it (which they reminded me to do as I was leaving the farm.)

The only people who spoke English all day were me, Davo and Tico. (Another friend, Michayel Gevorgyan was supposed to come with us and practice his English, too, but he had to do something else.) Davo and Tico had to listen to me, as well as interpret back-and-forth for the other adults. They got in a lot of practice and they did a very good job of listening, understanding and speaking English.

There is a book entitled, “If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat.” It’s based on the Bible passage in which Jesus walks towards the Disciple-filled boat and calls Peter to come out to him. Apprehensively, Peter gets out and focuses on Jesus as he realizes he, too, is walking on water. But, when the wind picks up just a little, Peter’s gaze falters and he begins to sink into the lake before Jesus grabs him by the collar to pull him back up.

I feel like my two trips to Lake Sevan this past weekend were like walking on water, and I thank Jesus for looking deep into me so I realize that I can remain focused on Him for the journey.

*Peace!*

*Story and Photos by Pamela J. Karg*



*A World War II memorial.*