

Armenian Orphans and My College Students – Oct. 3, 2005

It was a week of extremes, from touring farms with orphans to touring plants with college students. But each one created memories for a lifetime.



First, the UMCOR Farm Demonstration Project organized farm tours for children from an orphanage. It was one of the same orphanages I had visited last year because it receives free cheese from UMCOR.

To begin, the children toured the vegetable greenhouses that Hamlet cares for as part of the UMCOR project. Produce grown here is distributed to the orphanage and other

vulnerable people because policy prevents it from being sold in the commercial marketplace. The children were a bit shy after touring the greenhouses and seeing me board the bus with them for the trip to the farm.



As we neared the farm, though, I knew that Anush from UMCOR would help me interpret for the kids. I explained to them that every child who tours a farm learns the song, “Old MacDonald’s.” They tried their hardest to learn it and did well on the E-I-E-I-E-I-O part—and they got a real laugh out of watching me make my animal noises and actions. Flapping my wings as a chicken and turning up my nose like a pig warmed them up to the animals they were about to see.



On the farm, some of the children were a bit scared of some of the animals. This was their first time around them and they didn’t know what to expect. But holding their hand as well as holding an animal for them, the children trusted us to keep them safe. We did not let them down. They got to see, touch, feed and smell pigs, cows, sheep and chickens before heading off to a restaurant for a BBQ and then to a clearing in a nearby woods for a game of soccer. While I’m getting in shape with all the walking we do

here, it was still best that I play goalie—and part-time referee in the girls vs. boys game that ended in a 3-3 tie.

As I gave each one a hug and a kiss on the bus to bid them good-bye, the tears welled up in my eyes. All any of them wants is for someone to love them, to care about them, to give them a hug

and a kiss each day, and to tell them, “God made you and you are special.” Someone else commented that I created memories for them that will last a lifetime. I think they did the same for me. No, I know they did.

Two days later, it was a different kind of day with young people when the students from the Agribusiness Teaching Center where I am teaching Public Speaking boarded a bus for some tours. I only found out about the tours on Friday morning and I was glad I could attend. It was a



chance to see my students outside the classroom and how they handle themselves in a different situation. For some, it was also a chance for them to see me “let my hair down,” though not too far because I am still the teacher. They also could talk to me one-on-one to continue practicing their English and to explain their homework (which was due Friday



night before they went out with their friends.)

During the day, we visited a modern Armenian juice processing facility—complete with computerized equipment from Allen-Bradley, Tetra Pak and Alfa Laval. They were processing peaches and barrels filled with peach pits lined the factory compound. It was chilly, so we didn’t run into too many bees!

We also stopped by a potato chip manufacturing plant, as well as a factory compound area where, in separate buildings, they produced wine, brandy (cognac), pickles and other vegetables. As much as I would have liked to, we did not sample the drinks. However, we all got plenty of bags of chips. They were salt and garlic flavor, though they were not as salty nor as garlicky as they would be in the States.



It was interesting to watch these first-year students ask questions of the various plant managers and to gauge how inquisitive each one was about the various facilities. It was also fun to see how they overcame their shyness to talk with me. I was extremely overwhelmed, however, for all the requests to have my picture taken with them. Such outpouring of respect and love for a plain old person like me was unbelievable.



The day included plenty of the time for the students to continue bonding to each other, an important part of life here. Everyone forming attachments to their families and then to groups such as their college class, and keeping those bonds for years into the future. It ended with a short visit to Etchmiadzin (Armenia's "Vatican") and then a BBQ at an alum's

house near the churches.

Story and Photos by

Pamela J. Karg, United Methodist Volunteers in Mission

From the Wisconsin Conference

Serving at the United Methodist Committee on Relief – Armenia office

<http://www.umcor.am> or pjkarg@baraboo.com