

Elderly Armenian Women... January 22, 2006

Finally, I find time to get back to my own writing for this site. It's been a crazy few weeks with the holidays, visiting students and being sick. But it's also been a time for personal reflection and reading. More on all that later, in a subsequent note.



Now, my priority is to show you some of the people I've met while out visiting villages.

Armenians say there's a difference between Yerevan folks and village people. I have to agree with that broad generality, though each has nuances that sometimes reveal themselves to me at unexpected moments.

Yerevan is a city of 1.5 of the country's 3 million people. It's loud and smoggy. There's traffic everywhere, people honking, cars zooming by and folks sometimes pushing to get by each

other on the sidewalk. There's litter and stray dogs. It's a big city, like any other big city in the world. And, when you find a quiet spot like the street I live on or one of the courtyards or parks, the first thing you notice is the silence. I enjoy it and relish every minute of it.

In the villages, life is different. The first things you notice are the fresh, clean air; the silence; the warming sun on your face; the beauty of the mountainous skyline surrounding you. And the people, with their warmth and good cheer, invite you into their homes and a seat next to the wood burning stove.

I find village people so fascinating because they can be complex. And I am especially always



aware of the elderly, their faces lined with so much history about this place and even of the world. They are the backbones of these villages, traditions and families.

They are self-sufficient and self-reliant, raising some animals and always tending a big garden in which they grow so much of their food. They offer you homemade tan (yogurt with water and salt), cheese, cured meats, dried fruits, more pickled vegetables than you find in a supermarket, and any type of beverage you want. They also have a sense of humor



and are always ready for a hearty laugh. Entertaining a foreigner, especially an American, is like having royalty stop by for tea. In some ways, I guess it is because most people come to Yerevan and stay there, only venturing out to the major tourist attractions. Unless, of course, they are Diaspora. Then it really is a requirement that one returns to his or her parent's or grandparent's village. Inevitably, someone there remembers the previous generations and you are instantly wrapped in the warm arms of love and hospitality.



It is terribly humbling for me when this happens because I find the journey to be about them and getting to know these wonderful people. I think how I am just a plain person, no one rich or famous or fancy or even important to life such as a doctor or nurse. So I enter with humility because I don't consider myself anything different from them. And when I have a chance, I always thank and praise them for their generosity as well as God for putting these interesting people into my life.

So I listen to their stories, catching only a few words here and there, but understanding its intent. I watch them as they talk and I am amazed by their resiliency. Think about it. Some of these people started life under extreme conditions but in a free society. Then they lived through and became secure during 70 years of a routine, regimented Soviet government. Now they are back

to trying to cope with the extreme conditions creating a democracy can put into life. At 14, Armenia still has years to go to figure out how to be a free and open society...and I believe its elderly hold the key to that learning.



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