



Behind Doors – July 25, 2006

It's nearly August and my once-a-week, two-hour Public Speaking class at the Agribusiness Teaching Center will take an August hiatus. In fact, just about everyone likes to take an August hiatus. Already some UMCOR people have headed to their ancestral summer homes – dachas – for a few weeks of rest and relaxation.

My first weekend here, I was so happy to be invited to Lida and Rashid Mughdusyan's dacha. They are the people who own my apartment. (I have another little story I'll post after this one about some of those experiences, so read it for a little more.)



Now I want to talk about my early-morning walk around the village where the Mughdusyan dacha is located. The village is near Yerevan at a higher elevation so the air is cooler and cleaner than the pollution-clogged capital. After I crept out of the dacha yard and ventured into the early morning, I re-visited a small church at which Lida, her daughters Shushonik and Tatevik, her three grandchildren and I had lit candles the night before.

The door was locked. I was a little sad because I thought the solitude of the small, old church would have been soul-filling at a time when I felt like standing in the presence of the few, meager icons of Christ. I wanted to thank Him for all He has given me and ask Him to continue

to walk with me, to give me courage, to help me remain focused.

So I turned around and continued my walk through "streets" that Americans would view as footpaths at best. Few people were out, though I could hear faint voices beyond the scrubby, old brick or sleek, new concrete walls that lined the streets and separated one person's dacha from another.



As I walked, I noticed the gates that led to each dacha yard in which grow beautiful roses, gerbera daisies and other flowers we know in Wisconsin; that held gardens plump with tomatoes, peppers, cherry, fig and apricot trees; and kept intact a few possessions such as a hammock or a square, metal trough used for barbecuing. The gates or doors interested me, so I began to take photographs. Afterwards, as I looked at these doors and recalled the ornately carved ones I've photographed at some of the churches, I began to think. (Not being able to unlock my own

apartment door tonight for some reason, after nearly an hour of struggling, also made me think about doors!)



On one level, I wonder what stories these doors could tell. The generations that have passed through them. Life's celebrations of marriages, birthdays and funerals that have passed through them. The hard times of one family's rusted door and the American-sent dollars that bought another family's new door. The history they have stood up against or tried to protect a family from. The secrets whispered through them. The laughter of children running in and out of them.

Such stories these doors could tell, if only they said something more than, "Squeak, squeak." That language I do not know. Learning more Armenian has been enough of a challenge.

Yet, on another level, I wonder about doors.

Sometimes, we close our doors to others. We don't like them for some reason. We're scared to let them see what we have inside. We want to be alone. We're embarrassed by what we lack. We hope to hide the truth from them. We're suspicious of why they stand before our door.

The church door may have been locked yet, as I turned, I could see Christ in the pre-dawn blue and pink clouded sky. I could hear Him in the cattle walking through the village streets. I could feel Him in the cool air and smell Him through the scents wafting over the dacha walls.



Sometimes, we think we can only find Christ in the church – or, worse, we think that we should keep Him in the church while we go about our business outside the church doors. Neither is the case, of course.

Christ is everywhere and in everything. He is always with us. The church door can be locked, but He cannot be contained. We can try to close our doors to Him. Yet the door of our heart is really always open because He holds the only key and He knows when it will be unlocked.

Peace!

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