

Culture Shock



a lot of fast food - McDonald's and Pizza Hut. I am currently stocking food for the winter, I have 25 jars of spaghetti sauce and 50 liters of soda! I am now enjoying the delicious summer fruits and vegetables. Finally, my adjustment was enhanced by playing basketball with Nick and friends at the International Red Cross.

I am so surprised with the Armenian culture that I am now less happy with the East Coast American way of life - working long hours and making money at any cost to you and others. Also, the down-to-earth Armenians make status-seeking Americans more difficult to cope with. On the other hand, I often miss many conveniences that exist in US. and the efficient nature of things there - my patience has definitely improved here. As a result of experiencing Armenian culture, I no longer take so many things and people for granted.

With respect to my interpersonal skills, I had to immediately improve my listening and speaking skills. In order to communicate more effectively with students who were learning the English language.

I have learned that it is crucial to seize the moment here - the electricity and water will disappear without warning. I have also learned something that is totally opposite to the American culture: In the US., when in doubt, throw it in the trash. In Armenia, when in doubt save it for some future clever idea.

The craziest thing that happened to me was when the Armenian government came to my apartment to deliver an army draft notice. They were actually looking for someone who used to live in that apartment. Since I could not read Russian, I thought that I was being handed an order to appear in court! To say the least, I was very upset until the US. Embassy told me that it was only a draft notice served by mistake.

A final observation: Armenia appears to be a society that time has forgotten - its strong family values and moral behavior was last evident in the United States in the 1950s. I hope that this pure culture will stand the test of time and the influence of the vices of the West. The Israeli-like determination of Armenians will insure their survival for centuries to come. But, God help the Armenian children for they are paying a heavy price for past and present conflicts. I pray for them.

By Michael Conrad

Upon arrival, I felt totally disappointed from jet lag. After spending endless hours in the airport waiting for my luggage, I finally arrived at my apartment. It is difficult to say how I actually felt at that time since I was so tired. At the very least I felt very nervous since this was my first trip outside the United States. My confusion was compounded by the nightly blackouts and unfamiliarity of the strange surroundings.

My weekend here was very difficult for me. My sleep cycle was nine hours off. I was awake for most of the first two nights. I was very hungry, but was hesitant to eat since I was unfamiliar with Armenian food. So I ate the crackers and candy I brought with me. I was very thirsty but was afraid to drink the water because I was told that it has to be boiled first.

But three days after I stepped off the plane, the first day of class, my jet lag and confusion had totally disappeared and I was in a happy frame of mind to greet my new students. The most important factor that helped me adjust to Yerevan was the friendliness of Armenians. Their willingness to help and share is a most incredible cultural trait. Also, I was so busy with my courses that I had little time to be concerned about the daily electric/water inconveniences. However, it took about a month to get used to the nightly blackouts. I slowly adjusted to the different looking food and I am now at the point that I have several favorite Armenian dishes. I would say that my adjustment to the food was the most difficult change to make. I was used to eating