

## **My Cup Runneth Over** – *Christmas Day evening*

Where do I start to tell you how full my life has been since my wonderful trip to Tbilisi? It's been a month. I really would have written sooner if 1) I had time and 2) I was so inspired. Right now, I am.

And all I can say is that my cup runneth over! It's the sweetest wine I've ever tasted. It's neither Georgian nor Armenian. To be fair, because of my students, it's from both and neither and always from God. It's taste is even greater than the 36 students who trusted me to teach them how to do a better job of speaking in public – in English (a third or fourth language for most of them!!)

It tastes of my 3<sup>rd</sup> year students at ATC, so full of talent and knowledge, and their spoken love for me. It tastes of the beautiful pink roses they gave me this past Thursday, our last day together as teacher and students. Yet, the wine tastes of the hot tears that filled my eyes and momentarily choked off my words when I tried to emphasize to them that the world is theirs – in a free and open society they are a part of creating – and they must always speak up as well as tell people why they believe life to be so!

It has the body of Habitat for Humanity Armenia, where ATC students and a couple UMCOR employees shared a few hours helping a family with flooring, and delivering all those donated things we give back home that really DO make a difference here. And, it's my students who did great speeches about other humanitarian programs operating in the South Caucasus – where helping family and friends is natural, yet helping a total stranger is a skill that has yet to be learned. And, it tastes of Nana from Georgia who missed a day of class to take some Heifer Project International training so she can someday help the Arkansas-based program as it operates in her homeland.

It tastes of a last-minute visit by Marcia to Yerevan from Tbilisi, as well as her note from England where she had to ask the desk clerk to repeat herself because Marcia wasn't prepared for pure English – as well as a store that had everything she needed and wanted – all in the same place. And, I have visions of her and her husband, Andrew, who met each other at Heathrow airport and are spending this week together in Wales.

The wine in my cup has the color of writing promising grants for UMCOR that might get funded – or not. Yet, just the optimism that spreads through the office when a program comes together and a grant is written! It turns around sad faces and sad hearts – oh, the sweetness.

It's of Christmas music by the International School (where church friends Aaron from Canada and Ada from Mexico teach) at the Marriott Hotel in the Yerevan center, as well as the orphanage at Gyumri (site of the devastating 1988 earthquake) in Komitas Hall. Yet, it's also "Joy to the World," "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "Silent Night" by candlelight that the choir sang in church this morning, even though Christmas here isn't until January 6. And, the tolerance of the whole church as they accepted my preaching last week (on the topic of Christmas symbols, thanks to Pastor Dianne Vielhuber!)

It tastes of sweet apples and freshly baked lavash from Mariam and her parents in Bjrukan, as well as the choratan cooked by a very pregnant Lusine while her three-year-old son and I played cars on the floor. And, I pushed them the wrong way, to which he said, “Chey, Pam jan.” (I can talk to a three-year-old in Armenian pretty good!!) And there’s a hint of the grand turkey dinner with all the trimmings I just cooked for Michael Cooney, from Rhodes Island, and Mick and Julia Foster (British and Russian, respectively. Mick brought real, live Ocean Spray jellied cranberries, thanks to Randy who works at the US Embassy.) And, there’s the last-minute, late night invitation from Armen and Nazek to sit at her aunt’s table for a good-bye “snack” before her aunt left for a little vacation in Moscow.

The wine in my cup reminds me of my 4<sup>th</sup> year students who I am now teaching Business Management Ethics to, even though they’ve had trouble making it to class! Yet, they did a great job as hosts and hostesses during the Center for Agribusiness and Rural Development’s Armenian wine and cheese-tasting event at the US Embassy just a week ago.

It smells of the brewed Starbucks coffee Dr. Daniel Dunn has served me at the little house he has lived in for seven years here, as well as the sage he gave me for this evening’s stuffing!

It is tinged with wonderment as UMCOR driver Hovik, his wife (my tutor last year) Lianna and their sons packed only suitcases – instead of crates – because they won a visa in the lottery and are now (I presume) settled in Los Armenios, California, with family. And it has a scent of money loaned or given to people who want to make wishes here come true!

My wine includes your emails and your prayers. The wonderful e-cards and the text messages on my Armenian cell phone (Yes, Cheri Johnson, I have text messaging here, but not on my cell back home!!) My wine also has your love and support in it, making it even tastier than the khash (calf hooves) I cooked a few weeks ago for Kara and a few UMCOR drivers. Your promised packages (none have arrived yet) and your understanding for taking care of things back home are also part of my cup.

Have I forgotten anything? Probably. But...

Oh, this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us all rejoice and be glad in it because God did send his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will be saved and have everlasting life!

My cup runneth over...won’t you drink of the same cup? And taste the joy that comes from giving of yourself to others – and knowing that Emmanuel has come to us!

Hope, peace, joy...and all my love this Christmas Day evening!

By Pamela Karg

PS I’ll load more stories in the coming days. I promise!