

Im Tun, Mer Tun (*My House, Our House*) – July 14, 2006

My former roommate and Individual Volunteer in Mission compatriot Marcia from Florida asked for photos of “our” new apartment. So I thought I’d share a glimpse of my Yerevan digs with everyone.

Believe me, it’s shat, shat lav (very, very good) compared to our other apartment. The apartment where I lived for six weeks in 2004 and then with Marcia and I in 2005 was nice and we loved our space with its grape-vine covered balcony. Yet this one is nicer and more special to us because it’s owned by our dear friend’s family. Lida and Rashid were going to sell this apartment when I needed to move out of our other apartment. I asked to rent it my last month – March – and they agreed. Then we worked out an arrangement where I could continue to rent it on my return and remain as long as I want, provided they don’t need to sell it to pay for any unexpected downturns that can befall an Armenian family.

Oh, and I talk about “we” and “our” because I feel like Marcia is still here with me, even though she’s home and EXPECTING!!! (Shnorhavor—congratulations!) And, when she has visited, another VIM’er from the Republic of Georgia, Laura, gets to stay here...in Marcia’s room.

It’s a 16-story building at a busy intersection next to a bridge, behind a restaurant and two long, level blocks from the Metro subway station. If I take a taxi, I say “Stretch Café mote.” (By Stretch Café, or another word for Stretch would be Bridge.) Being a high-rise means it doesn’t have natural gas. Therefore, we have electric heaters. (Our former apartment had gas and a gas space heater.) When I moved in, in March, no one had lived here for four months and it was COLD! I only heated the living room, sleeping there, too.

There’s an elevator, but I chose to walk the stairs up to the fourth floor. There are four apartment doors into the vestibule and ours is the one with the light and dark green tiles in front of it. When you enter, you’re in the foyer, I guess you’d say. There’s a pillar in the middle of it, two chairs against one wall, a coat rack and doors to each room. I’m going to put a table in it for the telephone and my computer.



The first door to the left is Marcia’s room. The frilly tangerine bedspread reminds me of the one my friend, Dawn, and I slept under during our week at a Jamaican home. The furniture is all dark wood, with a dresser and mirror and an armoire with a full-length mirror. There aren’t too many closets in Armenia. To store stuff, you put it in armoires that are in just about every room everywhere.





The next door to your left off the foyer is the living room. Usually, furniture is lined up around the outside walls, but I re-arranged it in March to be more cozy. There's a small television, couch, two chairs, a coffee table and a piano – of course. If pianos were not chopped up for fuel during the harsh winter of 1994-95, they're now the centerpiece of a home. It was on the outside wall and I moved it in front of a large window that looks out onto an enclosed balcony. That's better for the piano, I was told once when we got a piano for my sister, Theresa. On the piano,

there's actually a lamp. In fact, it's one that you touch to turn on. I don't see a lot of lamps around, so I feel lucky to have one instead of always using the chandelier, which is made of beautiful burgundy-colored globes onto which have been painted flowers. It's one of the prettiest ones I've seen. There's a large, ornately carved China cabinet, though I have no China. I fill it with keepsakes from my students or special people back home.

Living rooms usually double as dining rooms, so I moved the table nearer the door – and the kitchen. That way people can sit, visit, watch TV while they wait for me to set my table – not that anyone has ever been here for a meal. The only visitors have been students and a few UMCOR drivers who stopped the night before I left in April; my landlady Lida, her granddaughter and son; Laura from the Republic of Georgia; and my friend, Nancy, and her children, Danielle and Patrick, from Wisconsin.

A window looks to the front of the building, where there's a little parking lot and a park. In the summer, it's filled with children and mothers. In a little hut off to one side, men congregate to play Nardi, which I don't understand; but I can tell you it's played on a Backgammon board. Next to the hut is a small well from which people draw water if it's turned off to the building (as well as to the area.) If anyone has an extra can of WD-40, send it because the park swing could really use some oil!



From the foyer, you can walk straight ahead to the kitchen. Now this is a million times nicer than our previous apartment. There are newer cupboards, quite a few pots and pans as well as plates, glasses and some utensils. And I've only seen three cockroaches! Ask Marcia and she'll verify that we had at least three cockroaches every morning!! There's also a stove and refrigerator – and I'm planning on buying a coffeemaker because I love coffee! A cup –





or even a whole pot -- of Berres Brothers from Watertown, Wisconsin, will be nice sometimes.

Some cupboard doors are a little warped and want to swing open, so I used Velcro to close them. But the adhesive back doesn't always want to stick, so I give them a little tap to re-stick them. One drawer also has a hard time staying on its track, so I pounded nails into it to hold it together. But I noticed the plastic roller on the track is a little worn, so I have to use my imagination to figure out how to fix that.

Off the kitchen is an enclosed balcony with a small bed. That's where I slept when Nancy and the kids visited. The piano against the curtained window in the living room provides a little extra privacy on the balcony. There are also a couple storage cupboards actually built into the wall and in

it Lida has some preserves. One lid on a huge jar of cabbage with other vegetables exploded in spring. The canning system here is a little different from what I'm used to in America.

Back in the foyer and next to the kitchen door is my bedroom. It has a queen- or king-sized bed, a carpet on the wall, an armoire and a dresser with a mirror. The beds are box springs onto which is put a hand-sewn mattress an inch or two thick stuffed with wool. The pillows are big squares, not rectangles like in America. Both have to be fluffed up every so often. There's also a small enclosed balcony off my room – about as wide as a large suitcase. The windows open so I can lean out to hang up my wash yet the enclosed space makes the room a bit warmer in winter because it doesn't open directly outside.



Next to my bedroom door in the foyer, the last two doors – opposite the living room and Marcia's bedroom door – are the bathrooms. One room has a sink and shower. The other room has a flush toilet. I brought a shower curtain from home and a new thingy to put on the wall so the shower head would stay up. When the water pressure is high enough, I turn on the water, then the switch to the heater and dial to one of three temperature settings for hot water. When the pressure is low and I'm trying to shower because I just raced in hot and sweaty from one thing and need to clean up for something else, I take a cold shower. But I get to use both hands since the shower head fits nicely into that thingy.



And there's actually a ceiling in the two rooms. In our other apartment, the wall between the two did not go to the ceiling and we grew used to listening to each other in the other room. The dropped ceiling is plastic and reminds me of something we might have had in 1950s or 60s America – totally retro!

All the floors are parquet wood, though the bathroom is the same tile you see at the entrance door to our apartment. There are some Persian – I mean, Armenian – rugs – I mean carpets – in a few spots. I also brought along weather-stripping for the outside windows. While they are double-paned, they only latch and air seeps through them. A few panes also need caulking, which I also brought. (I can get those items here, but my Armenian isn't good enough to ask for them and I'm "only a girl," so what would I know about such things?) I also want to sew some new, thicker curtains to keep the summer heat and winter cold out.



Well, that's a tour of our apartment. I want to take the wallpaper off the kitchen walls and paint them, but I need advice from my Sauk Prairie friend, Deb. I'm also going to "build" onto the big living room wall a collage of photos and other mementos people have given me. Otherwise, it's too bare. And it will be a wonderful reminder of the special people, places, events and feelings I've had so far in life!

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