

Salam everyone,

December, 2007

My adventures in Turkmenistan continue. Last week I traveled to my permanent site in Dashoguz City to check it out before I move in the end of December and spend the next two years of my life there. I mentioned in my last email that I was SUPER excited about my permanent site. I can say with confidence now that all of my excitement is justified. I spent last week meeting, observing, and hanging out with my new counterpart (teacher I will be working directly with), visiting the school I will be working at, meeting my new host family and nearby Peace Corps Volunteers, and touring my future city.

The school I will be working at is one of two language specialized schools for 1st-10th graders in the city. My school teaches German and English. My friend's school (another volunteer) will be at the French and English school. The students at these schools have been studying English since they first started attending, unlike most other schools in Turkmenistan which instituted English just this year. It also has limited enrollment based on an entrance exam. The students all appear to be very motivated, and excited to have me there. After a few of the classes I participated in during my visit, several of the students surrounded me to get my autograph. The teachers at the school all seem very welcoming and, of the classes I've observed, have solid teaching methods. My currently undefined role at the school is open to whatever I imagine. An extra plus is that I will get to practice my German. The few days I visited the school I spoke in an unimaginable mix of English, Turkmen, and German. Soon Russian will be added. I can't wait.

Besides having a heavy Russian influence, it's hard to imagine a more Soviet-looking place, Dashoguz city is ethnically 70% Uzbek. Most people in the city speak Turkmen, Russian, and Uzbek. I have met several who also speak English. When I used to think of multilingualism, the Dutch always came to mind. It's amazing to realize how many other out of the way places have such abilities. The children in my future host family (there are 5 total with one neighbor baby on the way) have all studied foreign languages. They understand how to communicate with me by slowing their speech and rephrasing their sentences, which is vastly different from how my current family attempts communication. I'm looking forward to getting some comprehensible input.

Other notable features of my new family are that they are incredibly welcoming and fun. My first night there was my host sister's birthday, and they actually got up and danced after dinner. This would be unthinkable in the region I currently live. Also, the women in my family will wear pants occasionally, and women and men shake hands. When I move in with this family, I will officially be a member of Posh Corps. I will have such luxuries as a bed, a mirror, a desk with a chair, running water, heat in my room, a washing machine, a piano, air conditioning! (very important on the 120 degree summer days), and good food.

Have a very happy holiday season! I will send more stories soon.

Men sizi goresim gelyar. (I miss you all)

Sag bolun,

Kelly

