



October 9, 1996

Dad-

First, I want to thank you so much for being the way you are being. You would probably admit that the past few years have been interesting and unpredictable, but rational me – I would have never thought you could be so supportive and amazingly telepathic. You say it is your travel abroad experience and that you understand adjustment and homesickness, but it seems more than just this (although this is REALLY important for me right now as I get settled here in Bulgaria). Being here is hard, but knowing I have love and support from friends and family helps more than I can ever tell you.

Both Trish and Mariah have written me thanking you for your calls or sending along letters. They and I really appreciate you doing the grassroots work over there on spaceship USA!

Things here are hard to explain simply because this is my life now. I'm happy with this decision and each day that becomes more and more apparent. The best thing is I am out of the American rat race. What the hell is so important or pressing to keep the schedules Americans keep? I feel busy and productive even though just four months ago this would seem slow and even boring. I work from 7 to 1:30, come home, or run errands, (Did I just call this home?) cook, nap, and lesson plan for the next day, maybe grade some papers, listen to music, smoke cigarettes to enjoy them not just for the habit or something to do. I write letters, read books, play pool, go to movies and cafes, talk with my Bulgarian friends, or hang out with other volunteers passing through town. I don't feel like I'm on vacation, but to think back a million years ago – I was so damn busy - for what? What did I do or feel needed to be done that gave me headaches or made me daydream of sleep, vacation, or even wishing for the clock to stop for just a few hours?

Breathing is a wonderful thing – it isn't overrated – neither is listening to the rain pass through the grape leaves hanging above and fall to the ground. Americans just don't know what they are missing. It isn't so much about sunsets and rainbows – it's just living a life that is fulfilling and that should be enough to be content. I find myself missing the convenience of American life – telephones that work without electric tape, drive through, credit cards, gas pumps, but is that the meaning of my life? I'm too young and for that matter, so are you. Have you made a child smile or, better yet, blush today? I have. Have you listened to a student use an idiom correctly that you taught a week ago? I have.

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Have you watched your most frustrating class that wants to torture you to death smile and imitate your jokes? I have. So far this is my life. Yeah, its getting really cold, but today, I bought fresh tomatoes, potatoes, and some hand picked spinach from an old lady weaving a hand knitted scarf with three visible teeth. Today, I sat on a trolley into town next to a bag of live chickens on the way to the market. Today I realized I am living MY life, It's not so much that life is what you make it but life is what you decide to let live through you. Life is meaningless without your sense of self. It needs you as much as you want it to. I wish I could remember where I read this, but it is true – “bleed life as you live it”. Life cannot be bled to death only reincarnated through your daily habits and rituals. Make your own days count and matter not to the “normal” man or woman but to you. After all you are what matters in your life. Right?

Wow- I just exploded in this letter. I hope you can read it, because I feel a lot better.

Before I forget, my students will be writing you and others letters soon so please spread the word and write them back! I thought of this because their handwriting is WAY better than mine.

I'm starting to write in Bulgarian which is funny to me. I think it is because I am tired or because I am in a train car heading to Plovdiv for the weekend and local folks are chatting all around me. It is so hard to listen to different accents in Bulgarian understanding what they are saying and write in English even if my thoughts are in Bulgarian...

You asked about food here – not sure if this is about a pending decision to visit me (PLEASE – I would love to show you my new home!) or your personal trainer-ness kicking in and wondering about my food intake...

Today I had some of my lentil, red pepper, spinach soup, homemade biscuits with kashkaval (the melting cheese here; Mema's recipe), vinegar and basil salad dressing and fresh tomatoes, salty feta like cheese (the other kind of cheese that crumbles) baked with rice and potatoes, distilled water, hot herbal tea from the fields behind my school, raw milk, and homemade wine. Don't forget the Reese's peanut butter cups and Oreo cookies (thanks for the package by the way!) See I'm healthy and I eat but I am still loosing a lot of weight fast. Soon I will disappear and be only muscle I guess.

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Before I close, I just want to describe what I see rushing by me outside of the train window, but it is hard to pick what to talk about. I catch myself looking outside and the beauty zipping past and then I look down to start writing and look back up and get sucked in again. It isn't exotic like some Peace Corps sites I think of but then again it is. It isn't full of new images or things I have never seen – although mountains for this Texas girl are impressive. It isn't outdated only –but maybe it is the juxtaposition of modern and historic all learning together. Like the mule pulling a two wheeled cart piled a dozen feet high with hay or barley or something grassy tethered lightly to a Coca-Cola sign next to a café that sells Lucky Strike cigarettes that really doesn't nor does it have Coca-Cola but sells something like tires and bras. Maybe what I should be describing is the deep crevasses that run north and south, east and west, fiercely cutting across a landscape of ... huh, was I describing the rivers cutting into the green fields outside coming down from the mountains or the million year old women sitting across from me?

I just chatted with the woman and then asked her how old she is- 54. Unbelievable, she looks like she was consulted when the earth was formed. I guess it goes back to what I was saying earlier. Why do Americans rush around so? The work we do isn't near as hard as what this woman has done today... look at her hands, her, eyes, and her bright smile. I have so much more to learn...

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