

March 15, 2007

## VISIT TO AN ARMENIAN ORPHANAGE

### Day 6 Diary from Lila Tocci

Today we went to an Armenian orphanage. World Vision is trying to convince the government to phase out these institutions since 80% of the kids in these places have parents, albeit dysfunctional. It was tough to see this big old dilapidated Soviet-era building, central heat no longer working and old, rough wood flooring, basically untouched since it was built in 1968 except for the World Vision donated bathrooms and cafeteria sinks. You realize what a lot our government does do, republican or democrat. We may complain about more this or less that, but I can't help but thank God we have a government that works.



Steaming mountains of trash outside of Yerevan (upon which is sited the detention facility/orphanage)



Orphanage hallway, bedrooms, and kitchen (these photos are AFTER repairs done by World Vision)

The orphanage was filled with so many sad things. The doors were locked between the older and younger boy's bedrooms, packed four to a room, to prevent sexual abuse. The strong smell of urine from bed wetting was everywhere. There were so few books. Almost nothing decorated the walls. The fat head administrator, who didn't have so much as a computer or file cabinet, had two refrigerators and a TV. Everything was broken and cracked. Windows were broken. Today was cool and we all had to wear jackets indoors. But last winter, we're told, it was -5 inside!



Lila Tocci confronting the administrator by simply asking "...So, what do you do here?" Look out mister!

### Home Visit With A Boy Reclaimed From An Orphanage

We visited the family of a young man who was "redeemed" from the institution by his mom. She wasn't the most stable or capable of women and chose to place her son with the state when her husband started drinking and physically abusing her. Social workers and psychologists with World Vision intervened, counseled her and convinced her to regain custody. Now they live in an old Soviet apartment building with no heat and no lights in the hallways. I'm not sure if there is water. I saw a sink in the entry way but it did not look like it had been used. The apartment was full of clothes and jars and things strewn here and there. In spite of the disarray, the boy came in and took out a folder of his drawings. One had been submitted to a World Vision children's contest. It won. He was proud to show it to us. The mother brought out a weaving she was working on. When I went out into what I think was a kitchen, the older brother was showing John

[Tocci] and Tim [Tocci] his portrait pencil sketches. They were truly works of art. In the midst of this chaos, in the midst of the crumbling concrete steps, boarded up elevator shaft, dark hallways with electrical cords dangling like overgrown vines and trash just heaped up besides the building, this family was together. The youngster was proud, the older brother gifted, and the mother, who never got out of bed although, dressed in several layers of clothing, dignified.



Lila Tocci and the mother; Mother and son reunited; The proud artist!

## The End Of The Day

We just returned from a wonderful dinner with the Director of the Development Program, a young woman named Marina, and Mark, the National Director. We ate, Mark poured wine and toasted his fine employees, especially Marina. They work fearlessly, in spite of a government that would prefer that they sit down and shut up. Marina goads Mark, although I don't think he needs much prodding. We even danced a traditional Armenia folk dance to the live music playing at the restaurant. So it was a full and hard but delightful day.

We have been in desperate places yet seen wonderful things. We are meeting compassionate dedicated people. It all cannot be neatly separated yet, perhaps because humanity is like that, where does the noble end and the base begin? Truly I am glad to be here. Truly I have no idea of what God will ask us to do about all of the deep need we witness.