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DIFFERENCES?

As I sit down to write this letter, praying for wisdom in how to start, I gaze out our front window to the distant mountain and think about how different Greece is from the States.- the scenery, the people, the culture... A rather strong, but short earthquake just shook the house- okay, that's one way it's different for me!... There are things that frustrate us, things that make us shake our heads and laugh, and things that make us very thankful for the place that the Lord has called us to.

We were recently waiting for something (local) to be delivered to our home. We were promised delivery in three weeks. Eight weeks and several phone calls later it finally arrived- no apologies or explanations offered. On the other hand, a few days ago an electrician came to our home and worked for more than an hour, fixed several things and charged us a total of 36\$! ... Doctors' hours are only three days a week, from 3 or 4 in the afternoon until 9 or 10 at night. But, our Dr. makes house calls when necessary and medicines are rather inexpensive.... Supermarkets are closed in the evenings and on Sunday. But at some local shops, if you don't have enough money for your purchase, they'll wave their hand and say, "Just bring it next time." The other day I went to the hardware store to buy a tool. The owner said, "Just take mine and use it. Bring it back another day." We've had a banker tell us to come back another day because she was too busy doing something else to deal with us. However, at this same bank another employee called us and told us she accidentally shortchanged us in an exchange and would drop the money by our house later that day.... You want to hear a REAL difference between Greece and America? The other day Scott went into a car dealership to ask about vans and was totally ignored for a half hour, so finally he just left!....*So, what's my point?* I'll get to that later...

The kids are doing great! Kendra is 10 and in 5th grade. She has good friends at school and loves playing hopscotch at recess. She is very self-motivated and that comes in handy since she has several hours of homework every night! She loves to sing and spends every spare minute reading! She is a good big sister and still approaches life with enthusiasm! Cody and Kyle have unique personalities, though it's hard to think about one without the other! They are best buddies and can keep each other entertained for hours! **Cody is almost 8** and has done wonderfully in school. He has a sensitive spirit, and loves to tell "jokes". **Kyle, just 6**, loves to laugh and make others laugh, and he's good at it! He has a gift for impersonation! He's starting to enjoy kindergarten more, though he'd still rather stay home and play all day! **What can I**

say about Will? As Kendra recently observed, "He's like a human vacuum, sucking in everybody to himself!" No new accomplishment or trick is too small to be celebrated by the rest of the household! At 17 months, he is extremely BUSY and this is reflected by the frantic announcements daily reverberating through our house- "Will's hand is in the toilet!", "Will is on top of the table!", "Will has the telephone!", "Will is carrying around potatoes and onions!", "Will is pulling down the laundry!", "Will has the markers!"....You get the idea! My role as wife, mom, homemaker, teammate and "part-time missionary" keep me busy and fulfilled! As time passes, I realize more and more how much I need to depend on the Lord's strength and not my own, in order to grow in each of these areas. I am so thankful for Scott, who cares so lovingly for our family and gives so much of himself to others!

We opened the doors of the ARC (Athens Refugee Center) in November! The Lord has given us a beautiful facility! It is hard for me not to get choked up every time I walk through those doors and remember all of the prayers offered up by so many! God has used your faithfulness in praying and giving to create a place of warmth and light, where His voice can be heard. We estimate that about 1500-2000 came through the center in the first two months, to receive a warm meal and have opportunity to take part in language classes, Bible studies, viewing of evangelistic videos, tea bar, and personal interaction; or, to help themselves to some clothing or literature. We have seen *MUCH spiritual interest* as a direct result of the practical services we offer!

Our Christmas outreaches were well attended and many heard the true meaning of Christmas for the very first time! At the local refugee camp where we spend a lot of time, we did a Christmas program and gave gifts. At the ARC, we served a nice dinner, did a Christmas program, and distributed gifts. Thanks to all of you who once again contributed to our "shoe box" gift program. We were able to assemble over 500 gifts and they were received with much gratitude! Our family had a Christmas party here for several Kurdish, Iranian, and Albanian friends, singing songs in different languages (or just listening!) and swapping recipes!

On the 10th of January, The International School of Ministry began it's classes at the ARC! These quality courses, (offered as a partnership between International Teams and Encouraging Mission Endeavors) help us to fulfill the Great Commission - "Go and make disciples of every nation...." The course is offered in several languages and equips believers to be effective ministers of the Gospel. Kayhan and Nadir, the Iranian Brothers that we mentioned in our last letter, are now attending the classes, with the goal of returning to Afghanistan as missionaries!

WHAT DIFFERENCES?

So, back to my original thought... What IS the difference between Americans, Greeks, and the many nationalities that we encounter?... None. Under all the layers of culture, customs, religions and languages, we are all the same. The Kurdish mother up at the camp, trying to keep her baby warm, loves her child no less than I do. The unwashed Iraqi who comes into Tea Bar off the street needs respect and dignity just like you do. The Albanian man who comes for soup, desires to provide for his family just like my Greek neighbor. The Iranian that needs a blanket and warm shoes is every bit as entitled to share his thoughts and beliefs as I am, as an American citizen. But most of all, they all have souls that hunger to know their Creator. As you partner with us in your prayers, encouragement and financial support, you give us the opportunity to offer whatever we can in Jesus' name. Sometimes (often times), we are frustrated by the overwhelming need around us; yet, what we are able to offer can change a life for eternity! Thank you for standing with us! May God bless you in this new year with an increasing awareness of His presence and love for you!