

February 14 is Trifon Zarazen- The Bulgarian Holiday of Wine  
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It may be Valentine's Day in America, but February 14<sup>th</sup> is Trifon Zarazen in Bulgaria. This holiday celebrates the cutting of the grape vines to prepare them for the harvest. Typically, people get together; have a meal and some wine. Wine and Valentine's go well together. While in Bulgaria, I learned how important holiday celebrations are in understanding another culture.

I joined the Peace Corps when I was 21, fresh out of college. I was looking for to experience a new culture, to learn a language for an adventure. We arrived in Bulgaria right before Orthodox Easter. I got to experience crawling under the alter, circling the church 3 times at midnight with my beeswax candle. We were sworn in as Volunteers 3 months later, just a few days after American Independence Day, and set off for our sites.

A few weeks after arriving at site, some Volunteers organized a baseball game in my region. It was American Labor Day weekend, and we were going to play baseball and eat hamburgers- real American style 100% beef hamburgers! The baseball game, though in my region involved taking a bus to one town, walking across town to the bus station and catching another bus through a mountain pass and several hours of travel.

When I arrived I was greeted by other Volunteers and we got to work cooking our American feast. Two dozen Volunteers showed up. We had quite a spread and enough people for a proper game. A number of Bulgarian students came too, excited to play a new sport. We had a good game going, until one volunteer was knocked over and broke her arm. She broke a bone in her forearm, it was set by the local clinic doctor, but the next morning she headed to the capital for an x-ray a cast. Later, she said the worst thing about breaking your arm in Bulgaria is trying to do your dishes.

While she was brought to the clinic, the baseball game was put on hold, though some of the Bulgarian kids challenged the Americans to a soccer game- we lost. I got to know some of the other people from my region. One volunteer in particular, Chris, and I struck up a conversation. His site was a village in the mountains. He was working at the museum and with eco-tourism. He got to go hiking, while I was on a flat river plain. I was interested to see the village, I had heard about the carpet weaving done there. A few weeks later, I visited on September 6<sup>th</sup>- Bulgarian Unification Day when in 1878 the Treaty of Berlin was signed. We hiked up to the ruins of a monastery. A granny showed me the carpet she was weaving, and even let me try a bit. A few weeks later, Chris was visiting me September 15<sup>th</sup>- the first day of school holiday, no schooling actually takes place on this day. He came to see Baba Vida- the most complete fortress in all of Bulgaria. It was long before we were seeing each other every week.

Chris finished his Peace Corps service nine months before I did. He traveled a bit and went home to Alaska just in time for Christmas. Though we kept in touch, with e-mail and Skype, that winter seemed longer, darker, and colder. While we were apart, we decided to attend graduate school in the same city- Pittsburgh. That fall we both arrived, Chris in a Peace Corps fellowship and I had a scholarship due to my Peace Corps Service. A year after graduating, we were engaged on New Year's Eve. A year later we were married on Columbus Day, with a Bulgarian band and many of our Peace Corps friends present! We have been together ever since.

Our latest adventure is starting our family. We have decided to adopt a child from Bulgaria! We have longed to start a family, and we know the time is right. The child will benefit from having adoptive parents who can speak his/her language and understand the culture. This is one adventure that will last a lifetime.