

27 MONTHS OF PERSONAL PROGRESS

A monthly handbook of ideas to guide your personal development during your Peace Corps service



Special Peace Corps Armenia Edition 2012

By Evelyn Helminen, A-19

INTRODUCTION

Bari galust Hayastan! You will hear this phrase way too much, your first two months in country. But welcome, nevertheless, from all who have gone before you. Your life is about to get challenging.

Having been a Peace Corps volunteer in Armenia, I can predict some of the difficulties that you will face. As I battled with a billion difficult emotional and environmental factors, including fatigue, boredom, homesickness, and cold, I wished there was a guidebook to tell me how to overcome these situations. I couldn't find one, so I decided to create my own.

Consider this an informal solution to your problems. It has tangible ideas for getting you out of your funk and spurring you to action. You can challenge yourself, and you can play along with the other PCVs in your group, pushing each other to achieve more and grow more, every single month.

My hope is that you will find both silly and serious inspiration between these pages. I have done my best to match the Monthly Challenges to your probable moods and experiences at that time in Armenia. However, if there is a month where you don't like either of the challenges, feel free to choose a challenge from a different month. If all else fails, celebrate all the funny holidays listed for that month. (For more, see holidayinsights.com/moreholidays.) Also, feel free to adapt any challenge as you see fit.

Whatever helps you become a better YOU, whatever helps you through the tough times in a healthy and positive way, DO IT. Push yourself, and you will surely have 27 fulfilling months of personal progress.

Sincerely,

EVELYN HELMINEN, A-19

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MONTH 1

June

It's a little overwhelming, I know. There are cows in the streets, you are learning to bucket-bathe, and your new alphabet looks like a bunch of "u's" strung together. It's a little funny, having stacks of bread available at every meal; and exhausting, telling your host family you are full every two seconds. Take a few deep breaths, and try to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—MEDITATE FOR 15 MIN. DAILY

This will help clear your mind and keep you mentally prepared for what the upcoming days (and months) have to offer. The more often you do this, the easier it will become.

- * *Find a comfortable sitting position in a place with no distractions (i.e. your bedroom, with the door closed, at a time not close to mealtime.)*
- * *Set a timer for 15 minutes.*
- * *Close your eyes and take deep breaths.*
- * *Concentrate on your breathing and try not to think of anything at all, until the timer goes off.*
- * *When your mind wanders, check yourself, refocus on your breathing, and clear your mind again.*

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—KEEP A DAILY JOURNAL

Armenia is an interesting place to live for two years, and your impressions will change drastically over time. Start recording your thoughts and stories of Armenia right away, so you don't forget all that has happened.

Be yourself, if you feel like a 20-something and can keep up the pace, FINE! If not, don't worry, you are who YOU are. PC service is not a race but a personal life-changing experience each of us creates for ourselves.

1

Flip a Coin Day

4

Hug Your Cat Day

9

Donald Duck Day

16

Fresh Veggies Day

18

National Splurge Day

MONTH 2

July

Learning Armenian is hard! But you have memorized the answers to the 5 basic questions you are always asked: How old are you? Are you married? Why not/Where is your spouse? Do you like Armenia? How much are you paid? You are always with the same people, and you keep trying to convince your host mom that you can do things on your own. Don't fight it completely—get some people together and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—EXERCISE IN A GROUP

Hang out with fellow trainees and/or HCNs on your own terms, and feel healthy about it! Summer mornings are beautiful in Armenia. Wake up early and go running, take a walk, or do yoga with other people. Play soccer in the evenings with the local kids. At the same time, you can get to know about your fellow trainees' lives, pre-Peace Corps. Plus, it will show your host mom that you can be (semi) independent.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—PLAY CHESS

Feel like focusing on something other than language? Break out the chess board, a local favorite. Play someone in your host family, ask a new friend to teach you, or go big-time and wander over to the papiks playing in the park. It's good for the brain, to take a break from one challenge and be tested in new ways.

2

I Forgot Day

14

National Nude Day

15

Cow Appreciation Day

27

Take Your Pants for a Walk Day

31

Mutt's Day

MONTH 3

August

Congratulations! You are officially a Peace Corps volunteer this month! So why are you feeling so anxious, homesick, useless, and frustrated? Just because! Don't worry about it—it's perfectly normal, and will pass with a little bit of time. This month, it's a good idea to focus on the things that make you happy. Why don't you...?

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—EDIT YOUR SUMMER PHOTOS

You don't really need 5 pictures of khorovats sticks with raw meat dripping everywhere. You also don't need to keep that blurry picture of a random neighbor who popped over during site visit (she'll be back).

Delete all the pictures that are duplicates or near-duplicates, as well as those that are unidentifiable or just plain bad. Then when you look through your pictures later, you will easily be able to decide which to include in your slideshow/Facebook album/Powerpoint presentation about PST.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—HAVE A “WAKE UP” SCHEDULE

A coping mechanism is spending too much time in bed, which won't help you feel better. Waking up (and getting out of bed) at the same time every day will help you establish a routine and put you on track for a happier, more productive day.

Language problems? STOP comparing yourself with others. Do your best. Your Armenian contacts will love even your attempts to learn and speak their difficult language.

5

Work Like a Dog Day

13

Left-Handers' Day

16

National Tell a Joke Day

25

Kiss and Make Up Day

27

Global Forgiveness Day

MONTH 4

September

Still don't have a clue what's going on at your organization or school? Neither does anyone else! (Not that you should compare yourself to other PCVs.) Isn't this adventure you started grand? The weather is still decent, and you're allowed to travel on the weekends now, so spread your wings and..

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—Plan a TRIP

It's not too long before you are officially allowed to take vacation. (It starts 6 months into your time in country.) So start preparing! Research places to go, flights, prices, etc. Some tips:

- * Flights are generally cheaper out of Tbilisi, Georgia (but consider marshutni/taxi costs to get there and lodging costs if your flight is at an odd time)*
- * A lot of PCVs visit Istanbul*
- * You can "borrow" vacation days, if you haven't accrued enough yet*

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—STUDY ARMENIAN .5 HOUR/DAY

Don't let all those hours of language learning during the summer go to waste! Your first few months at site are the easiest, most relevant, and most important time to continue your language learning. If you've found a tutor, make it a point not to skip lessons, and to study each day.

If you haven't found a tutor, sign up at the Armenian Virtual College: <http://www.avc-agbu.org/home.php>. Learning online Armenian language and history can be a productive way to spend long evenings.

Consider this: many people back home are able to be PC volunteers but are not willing to make the necessary sacrifices. Many are willing but not able due to health and other things. Be thankful you are now living your dream.

6

Fight
Procrastination
Day

10

Swap Ideas
Day

11

Make Your Bed
Day

13

National
Peanut Day

17

National Apple
Dumpling Day

MONTH 5

October

What happened to your drive, your creativity, your enthusiasm for finally starting your real work as a Peace Corps volunteer? I know it's frustrating, still not knowing how you fit into your organization, but remember, you didn't join Peace Corps because you thought it would be easy! Take a deep breath and get your creative juices flowing, thinking up how to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—Plan a HALLOWEEN COSTUME

Rack your brain (and scour the Internet) to come up with the best costume ever, to wear at the upcoming Halloween party. Stretch yourself—be social and ambitious, and come up with a hilarious group costume.

You have tons of free time and a plethora of materials. Think: bed sheets, cardboard, tape, wood, clothing, scarves, odds and ends from any small khanut... Think Armenian! This is your chance to “be” someone/something that only other PCVs would understand.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—Maintain YOUR COMPUTER

What do you actually know about computer maintenance? It's not so easy to get a broken computer fixed here, and it's hard to go too long without a computer.

- * Delete old, unneeded files on your machine and empty the trash*
- * Install and run an Antivirus program (Avast is a good free one)*
- * Run a C drive cleanup*
- * Defragment your hard disk*
- * Find a computer whiz in your volunteer group who you can call with questions*

Keep in touch with family: siblings, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc. Skype is great, but a postcard from a foreign country is another affordable way to say “I love and miss you” from afar.

7

World Smile Day

11

Take Your Teddy Bear to Work Day

19

Evaluate Your Life Day

20

Information Overload Day

29

Hermit Day

MONTH 6

November

Hooray! You live on your own! That means meals whenever you want, eating whatever you want, and doing whatever you want, however you want. The freedom is sweet. But...what do you want to do? Why don't you give yourself a good reason to sit in front of your computer and try to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—WRITE A NOVEL

It is National Novel Writing Month! Join thousands of others around the world to write a 50,000 word fiction novel in 30 days.

Just write 2,667 words every day. You have the hours to spare, so give it a whirl and see what it feels like to be a writer! Get enough PCVs writing, and you can have write-ins. What's a write-in?

See <http://nanowrimo.org/> for all the details and to sign up.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—PRACTICE AN INSTRUMENT

What instrument have you been meaning to learn? Or what instrument do you have, that you've been meaning to play? Now is the time to focus your mind on new learning challenges.

Take lessons, either online or in person, to stay motivated. Other PCVs, or even HCNs probably already know your instrument. Ask them for help.

Ship Christmas or holiday gifts to the U. S. before the end of November. Mail service is slow from mid-Nov. to Jan. Advise your family and friends to do the same if you want gifts and care packages to arrive before Valentine's Day!

2

Look for Circles Day

6

Marooned without a Compass Day

9

Chaos Never Dies Day

13

World Kindness Day

17

Homemade Bread Day

MONTH 7

December

Where's the Christmas music, the store decorations, the Salvation Army bell ringers? That's right—in America! Of course you are missing friends and family right now, but this is your chance to learn about another cultures' traditions. But while you wait for Armenians to break out their own festivities...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—WATCH TED TALKS

TED stands for “Technology, Entertainment, Design,” and there are many conferences every year with dynamic speakers talking about “ideas worth spreading.” These talks are recorded and put online for you to see. Go to <http://www.ted.com/talks> to see more.

The following are excellent talks to view first:

- * http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html
- * http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html
- * http://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life.html
- * http://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_zander_on_music_and_passion.html

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—TAKE UP KNITTING

Learn to make something warm and useful. Many PCVs already knit and would be happy to teach you. Supplies are easy to come by. And you will feel more productive if you knit while you sit on your bed watching your new favorite TV show during the winter evenings.

Feel overwhelmed with surveys and reports? So does everyone else, but it is part of PC governmental expectations. Just “do it.” You'll feel much better and it will decrease the number of reminder e-mails cluttering your INBOX.

1

Eat a Red
Apple Day

8

National
Brownie Day

6

Mitten Tree
Day

21

National
Flashlight Day

31

Make Up Your
Mind Day

MONTH 8

January

Nor Tari! A 7-13 day feast like you've never seen! Now THIS is the holiday spirit and celebration that last month was lacking. Here's your chance to eat blinchik, pomegranate, kiwi, dolma, paklava, fish, pork, mayonnaise salad, bleu cheese, and nuts to your hearts' content—and beyond! After so much eating, it is definitely time to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—EXERCISE LIKE NEVER BEFORE

Take it to the max, with Insanity workouts. This is a set of workout videos that will test your cardio and muscular endurance. They are not easy and will get you sweating during the first few minutes of the warm-up. There are 3-minute workout intervals with a 30-second rest in between. Not for the faint of heart, but guaranteed to get you in shape if you follow the recommended schedule.

At least give it a try for a few days and see what happens. Imagine being able to tell your friends back home that you finished the Insanity workouts! They'll be seriously impressed.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—SET SMART NEW YEAR'S GOALS

SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound.

Why not set goals you can stick to this year? Go to: <http://livespace.com/> for help, encouragement and ideas. LifeSpace is a fun and intuitive goal management tool and online community.

If you plan to travel this holiday season, be sure to shnorhavor your family and friends before departing. It will mean a lot to them. If you are traveling during the holidays, send your Armenian friends a real Christmas card.

2

*Run Up The
Flag Pole and
See if Anyone
Salutes Day*

8

*Bubble Bath
Day*

10

*Houseplant
Appreciation
Day*

15

*National Hat
Day*

23

*Measure Your
Feet Day*

MONTH 9

February

Ches mrsum? Ches mrsum? Of course you are cold! It's February in Armenia! Vochinch, right? Put on another sweater and huddle under another blanket. It may be the coldest month, but after the 14th, they say, it only gets warmer. In the meantime, warm at least your heart by trying to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—WRITE a LETTER EVERY DAY

It's letter-writing month, as proclaimed by <http://lettermo.com/>. Write and send something out in the mail every day that the post office is open. It can be a real letter, a home-made card, just a picture, or anything else you can fit in an envelope and send through the mail.

Send your items to the same address or different addresses, it makes no difference to the challenge, just don't let it be an excuse that you don't know whom to send them to. If all else fails, go on the website and find an address there.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—PLAY FREERICE

Play intellectual games and donate grains of rice to the world food bank through <http://freerice.com/>. For every answer you get right, they donate 10 grains of rice through the UN World Food Program to help end hunger.

You can pick your topic from: humanities, math, language learning, sciences, English, chemistry, geography, and SAT preparation. (WARNING: This game may make you smarter. It may improve your speaking, writing, thinking, grades, job performance...)

It will be cold, inside and outside. STAY WARM. Forget fashion and culture. Wear a hat (even if you aren't a "hat" person). Wear gloves. Wear long underwear and extra socks. Whatever it takes.

4

*Thank a
Mailman Day*

7

*Wave All your
Fingers at Your
Neighbor Day*

11

*Don't Cry over
Spilled Milk
Day*

17

*Random Acts
of Kindness
Day*

28

*National Tooth
Fairy Day*

MONTH 10

March

Jeepers! Did everyone go into hibernation this year? How come it feels like nothing is getting done at work? Where are those language skills you thought you'd have by now? How come you still haven't figured out all your coworkers' names? Why can't you get a hold of anyone back home? And why is it still cold??? Hunker down for one more month and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—READ CLASSIC BOOKS

You have tons of time. May as well do something with it that keeps your brain sharp.

The following is a list of books to consider reading:

- * *“Crime and Punishment,”* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
- * *“Don Quixote,”* by Miguel de Cervantes
- * *“The Grapes of Wrath,”* by John Steinbeck
- * *“Jane Eyre,”* by Charlotte Bronte
- * *“Pride and Prejudice,”* by Jane Austen
- * *“War and Peace,”* by Leo Tolstoy
- * *“Uncle Tom’s Cabin,”* by Harriet Beecher Stowe

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—STAY OFF OF FACEBOOK

Is it a great way to keep in touch with friends, or is it a giant time-suck? Probably both, but right now it's leaning way more toward the latter. Give up Facebook for Lent this year. This month especially, it's even better if you can do both challenges at the same time!

Read Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring,” which caused revolutionary changes in environmental laws. Written 50 years ago, it still speaks to us, and is more meaningful as we see the disregard for the natural environment in Armenia.

1

*Peanut Butter
Lovers' Day*

2

Old Stuff Day

5

*Multiple
Personality
Day*

14

National Pi Day

16

*Everything You
Do is Right Day*

MONTH 11

April

Can it be? Fresh produce at the market? I know, you hardly dare believe it, but it's true. Spring is in the air! Put aside all your doubts, fears, disillusionments, frustrations, and lethargy. Break out the mops and buckets of water. Throw open your windows, get a song in your heart, and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—CLEAN YOUR APARTMENT

It's been a long winter. Start spring cleaning. Air out your bedding and mattresses. Scrub away the winter dirt. De-winterize your space. Un-plastic the windows. Take down and put away your heating element. Spread out into all the available rooms. Ahhhh! Doesn't it feel wonderful?

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—WRITE A SCRIPT

Join thousands of others around the world to write a 100 page script this month.

Script Frenzy is an international writing event in which participants write 100 pages of scripted material in the month of April. You may write screenplays, stage plays, web series, TV shows, short films, comic book and graphic novel scripts, adaptations of novels, or any other type of script your heart desires.

Go to <http://www.scriptfrenzy.org/> for more details.

3

Don't Go to Work Unless it's Fun Day

4

Walk Around Things Day

7

No Housework Day

17

Blah, Blah, Blah Day

30

Hairstyle Appreciation Day

Being called Tatik and Papik is a compliment. It means you are accepted as a special part of the family, ENJOY!!!!

MONTH 12

May

The world is coming to life around you. Leaves have appeared in the trees, there is green on the hillsides and variety in the clothing, you can find fresher and cheaper vegetables at your local khanut, and you can buy cherries by the kilo—the best season ever! This is the perfect time to focus on the beauty in your life and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—TAKE A PHOTO A DAY

Take lots of photos of people, places, things in your Armenian life—things you missed the first summer because of your schedule, stress, etc. Don't put this off thinking you'll have time later. You may not, and you'll be sorry! Follow these prompts. Or find your own theme (i.e. self-portrait, outdoors, new experience, etc.).

- | | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Begins with կ | 9. Small | 17. From khanut | 25. Sky |
| 2. Color | 10. Can't live without | 18. Weekend | 26. In the cupboard |
| 3. Breakfast | 11. Animal | 19. Awesome | 27. Tree |
| 4. Entertainment | 12. Drink | 20. Work | 28. Vehicle |
| 5. 5 o'clock | 13. Where you slept | 21. What you wore | 29. Big |
| 6. Favorite | 14. Man-made | 22. Grateful | 30. On the wall |
| 7. Reflection | 15. In your bag | 23. Black | 31. Neighbor |
| 8. Everyday | 16. Window view | 24. Sound you heard | |

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—PLAN FOR VISITORS

This is a great month for company! Plan what you are going to do with them before they arrive. Ideas include:

- * Go to Garni/Geghardt, Sevan, Echmiadzin, Tatev*
- * Introduce them to your host family, counterparts, neighbors, other PCVs*
- * Have them eat khorovats, dolma, gata, kyufta, (and for the adventurous:) khash*

1

Mother Goose Day

4

International Tuba Day

8

No Socks Day

12

Fatigue Syndrome Day

14

Dance Like a Chicken Day

MONTH 13

June

Ahhhh! Apricots and anniversaries, how awesome is that? All of a sudden, you are alert and active, again feeling alive and at peace with Armenia. Keep up the appetite for action—be attentive to appearances. Get artsy and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—ARRANGE YOUR APARTMENT

You know those things you've been "meaning to" fix or improve around your apartment/house? Do them! Decorate. Buy some things that will make your upcoming year more comfortable, more beautiful. It's not "too late." Quite the contrary—you will be here for another whole year, so it will be totally worth it.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—LEARN TO MAKE ORIGAMI

You know those people who can take any piece of paper and fold it into something amazing? With enough practice, you can be one of those people! If paper isn't cool enough for you, try 1,000 dram notes or dollar bills (if you have any left).

Two videos you can watch are:

* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4L5nDDgEEk>

* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4L5nDDgEEk>

1

Dare Day

3

Repeat Day (I said "Repeat Day")

6

National Yo-Yo Day

12

Red Rose Day

17

Eat Your Vegetables Day

MONTH 14

July

Summer camps, out-of-country vacations, hot and crowded marshutnis. Thus marks a July, void of the stress of PST. Remember those days? How does it feel to be on the “PCV Panel” side of PST training? What a knowledgeable veteran you have become! Ride the wave of self-satisfaction. Be a good role model and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—BE ACTIVE IN YOUR CSPP

You signed up for a reason. HIV/AIDS, Gen-Eq, PR, PSN, VAC. What have you done so far? Be a model volunteer this month and contribute to the groups you are involved in. Brainstorm, plan ahead, create videos, slideshows, and training materials.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—USE YOUR KITCHEN MORE

Vegetables and fruits are plentiful and cheap. The kitchen isn't cold. You have the volunteer cookbook, which is a great resource. There are no excuses for not cooking! Try new recipes. Try Armenian recipes. Share with your sitemates or Armenian neighbors. Everyone will be happy with you for following the challenge this month.

When you just can't stand another awkward conversation, trying to speak Hayeren and your listeners have ??? on their faces, meet for some unencumbered talk time, in English, with a fellow PCV. We all have those days.

3

National
Watermelon
Day

10

National
S'More's Day

26

National Dog
Day

28

Race Your
Mouse Day

29

More Herbs,
Less Salt Day

MONTH 15

August

Cue emotional roller coaster! You have new sitemates! Your old sitemates are gone! You had a visit from your family! You finally get to experience an Armenian wedding! Your work assignment is still confusing! You thought your Armenian would be better by now! You only have one year left! YOU ONLY HAVE ONE YEAR LEFT! What does that mean? It means you better get serious and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—PLAN AHEAD

This year your dreams for your organization can actually happen. You have a much more realistic understanding of what to expect and how to go about implementing your ideas. Think about what you have learned in the past year, and use that to your advantage, as you plan your upcoming year.

Create lesson plans, workshop outlines and flow-charts. Ask other PCVs for help or ideas. This is YOUR year. Own it.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—EXPLORE ARMENIA

It's a little crazy that you have been here so long and still haven't seen _____. Of course you have good reasons for that. This month, travel around a little more. The roads are still passable, the weather is bearable, and your organization is probably closed for summer holidays. You can go on trips to help other PCVs. Or you can just take walks around your own town, exploring those side streets you never went down before.

3

National
Watermelon
Day

15

Relaxation Day

16

National Tell a
Joke Day

23

Ride the Wind
Day

25

Kiss and Make
Up Day

MONTH 16

September

It's the start of a new school year, the temperature has cooled off a bit, you are settling into your new role as s/he-who-knows-all. But most notable of all is that it's vegetable harvest season. Produce is cheap! It's time to stock up. Are you going to can goods for winter? If so, this month's challenge is perfect for you. Either way, you can still...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—SAVE 25,000 DRAM

It's easier than you may think. Stay at site. Especially stay away from Yerevan, which eats your money quickly. You can even pretend you are on "site lock" with the new volunteers. Eat wisely. (Remember, fruits and veggies are cheap!) Don't spend money on alcohol. Take marshutnis, not taxis. Think twice every time you open your wallet, and those savings will be yours!

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—MEMORIZE GEOGRAPHY

Get into the school spirit. Relearn the states, capitals, and countries of the world and where they're located. As an added bonus, this will help you have conversations with your better-traveled friends about where they've been, and will give you ideas for where you want to go next.

If you like classical music, jazz or any other genre, treat yourself to as much music as you can during the Music Festival in Yerevan mid-Sept. thru Oct. Music is "poetry in the air" and will lift your spirits any time of year.

5

*Be Late for
Something Day*

11

*Make Your Bed
Day*

13

*International
Chocolate Day*

19

*International
Talk Like A
Pirate Day*

25

*Grandparent's
Day*

MONTH 17

October

Every time you get together with your Peace Corps pals, you talk less and less about the present and more and more about the future—what ARE you going to do post-PC? Instead of getting all panicky, think seriously about your options, then try to improve yourself. Pick an area and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—TAKE A FREE ONLINE COURSE

It's easier than ever to get educated in any subject—for free! Some classes you might take are available anytime, whenever you have the motivation. Others are like actual college classes with deadlines, homework and grading.

Choose from math, science, computer science, finance, economics, humanities, biology, business, education, nutrition, engineering, health, medicine, music, film, statistics...the list goes on.

The following websites are good places to start:

* <http://www.khanacademy.org/>

* www.coursera.org

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—READ A RELIGIOUS TEXT

Are you curious about different religious doctrines? Just want to learn more about religion? Interested in seeing what it is that other people find so comforting? Read a religious text, from beginning to end.

Winterize your home. Do everything you can to keep your costly heat IN and the COLD out. Strive to be comfortable even if it is "mi kich tank." A warm haven to return to each day is well worth the few extra AMD spent on heat.

5

National
Grouch Day

10

World Mental
Health Day

11

It's My Party
Day

14

National
Dessert Day

19

Evaluate Your
Life Day

MONTH 18

November

Whoa! Time to get serious. Your number of months remaining has suddenly shrunk to the single digits. When did that happen? This is no time to be a slacker; it's no time to start freaking out. It's your time to focus on what you want to do and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—JUST DO IT

Everyone has at least one—a “Before I Finish Peace Corps” goal. This is something that you had planned to do, in-country, before you leave. Maybe it's read a certain book, learn a certain skill, or experience a certain Armenian tradition. Put your mind to that task this month, so you have enough time to get it done, before you finish Peace Corps. No regrets, baby!

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—PREPARE FOR THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving shouldn't be a hurriedly thrown-together affair. Make it very special this year. Decorate your Peace Corps home with fall decor (Google “Homemade Thanksgiving decorations” for ideas) and a centerpiece, which you can work on creating all month. Let your English club or Armenian friends help, as a fun way to teach them about American Thanksgiving.

You also need to plan for real Thanksgiving food like cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, turkey, stuffing, and all the trimmings. “Order” special ingredients in care packages early in the month, so they arrive in time.

Then invite your closest friends and neighbors for a Thanksgiving feast to remember!

If you are retired, while some volunteers are preparing for the GRE and grad school, you can begin to research options for where you'll live, volunteer opportunities, continuing education programs, etc.

3

*Housewife's
Day*

8

*Cook
Something Bold
Day*

16

*Have a Party
With Your Bear
Day*

19

*Have a Bad
Day Day*

20

Beautiful Day

MONTH 19

December

Dreaming of a white Christmas? Maybe last year caught you a little off guard, but this year you are ready. You can combat those missing-home blues in tons of different ways: Take a trip, plan Skype dates to be at family's and friends' holiday parties, buy and wrap presents for your PCV friends, make and send Christmas cards.... You can even bring America here and...

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—DECORATE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Go all out this year. Get a tree, decorate it. String tinsel. Cut snowflakes and hang them in your window. Play Christmas music. Bake Christmas cookies. Make gingerbread houses. Do it all, and share your preparations with HCNs. Really get in the Christmas spirit this year!

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—READ FAVORITE PCV WEBSITES

Change your routine for someone else's for awhile. Find out what websites/blogs other PCVs like to read. Read them.

Some of my favorites are:

- * <http://www.danoah.com/>—Interesting and funny stories from a single dad
- * <http://www.mrmoneymustache.com/>—About saving money and lifestyle choices
- * <http://peacecorpsjournals.com/>—A collection of Peace Corps blogs
- * <http://petetorolashomelesspage.blogspot.com/>—My grandma's blog

Wear your Yaktrax. They work and are great conversation starters...and stoppers, especially if you have the fluorescent green or orange ones.

4

*Wear Brown
Shoes Day*

13

Ice Cream Day

16

*National
Chocolate
covered
Anything Day*

27

*Make Cut Out
Snowflakes
Day*

MONTH 20

January

Yes, after the whirlwind of Nor Tari, everything and everyone has gone into hibernation. It's tempting to hunker down under your blankets forever with the excuse of staying warm, but don't get sucked into the lull. Instead, summon up your excitement and enthusiasm for "heto," and...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—PLAY FUTURE LIFE

Imagine yourself someplace different...Research places you would like to travel to or live in. Find out all the important sights to see. Figure out transportation. Look for jobs there. Check out apartments for rent and houses for sale. Find a potential roommate. See what's going on, on Craigslist in your chosen city.

To get you started, go to <http://www.idealists.org/>.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—WALK OUTSIDE EVERY DAY

Sometimes it's the little things that make the biggest difference on your mood. Bundle up, put on your Yaktrax, and take a 30 minute walk outside every day.

Some days, even that's too much? Then make yourself get out of bed before __:00 a.m. You decide what's right for you, and stick to it.

If you did not experience Armenia's Nor Tari the first year, do so this year. There's nothing like it in the U.S. If you plan to be away, be sure to shnorhavor your Armenian friends before departing. It will mean a lot to them.

3

Fruitcake Toss
Day

6

Cuddle Up Day

11

Step in a
Puddle and
Splash Your
Friend's Day

16

National
Nothing Day

21

National
Hugging Day

MONTH 21

February

Life may feel a little bleak, but remember—February is the shortest month. It will be over soon, I promise! Instead of focusing on cold and snow and ice and work and language and lack of fresh produce, think happy thoughts of spring. Fill your head with funny ideas. Do something completely weird, like...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—PRACTICE YOUR HANDWRITING

According to the book, “Your Handwriting Can Change Your Life,” “When we purposefully change our handwriting, we introduce attitudes that can improve our relationships, give us the impetus to achieve and take risks, and simply bring out the best in us. This is because our handwriting is a reflection of our innermost thoughts and feelings.”

Is it true? Why don't you try it and find out? See these websites for ideas.

* <http://www.amazon.com/Your-Handwriting-Can-Change-Life/dp/0684865416>

* <http://didyouknow.org/handwriting/>

* <http://www.viewzone.com/handwriting.html>

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—DO 100 PUSH-UPS

Feeling sluggish? Get some exercise. Do the push-up challenge—Work up to 100 pushups in a row in 6 weeks. All you need is a good plan, plenty of discipline and about 30 minutes a week to achieve this goal! Go to <http://hundredpushups.com/> for more details.

Do it again! Join the letter-writing challenge, and write and send something out in the mail every day that the post office is open.

4

Create a
Vacuum Day

14

St. Sargis Day

22

Be Humble Day

27

No Brainer Day

28

Public Sleeping
Day

MONTH 22

March

What do you mean, you haven't accomplished anything tangible in Peace Corps? What do you mean, you're not integrated? What do you mean, you haven't made a difference? What on earth are you talking about? Instead of complaining about your perceived lack of achievements, figure out what you HAVE done and put it in writing. It will look way more impressive, and make it easy to then...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—APPLY FOR JOBS

Once your accomplishments are on your resume, you will have more confidence in yourself and will find yourself wanting to apply for everything!

Find jobs through the following websites:

- * Peace Corps Hotline—<http://www.peacecorps.gov/resources/returned/hotline/>*
- * LinkedIn— <https://www.linkedin.com/>*
- * Non-profit— <http://www.nonprofit-jobs.org/>*
- * Overseas— <http://jobs.goabroad.com/>*

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—CREATE A VIDEO

By now, you have accumulated enough pictures and stories to make a really interesting presentation of your life in Armenia. (Remember May's photo challenge.) You can put everything together to show to people back home when they ask about your Peace Corps service. Third Goal, Baby! Your PCV friends also will enjoy seeing your interpretation of your two years here.

It is exciting to think that your life is approaching another exciting phase in your journey. Keep an eye on Peace Corps Response positions in case that might be an option for you.

2

*Dr. Seuss's
Birthday*

3

*I Want You to
be Happy Day*

9

Panic Day

17

*St. Patrick's
Day*

20

*Extraterrestrial
Abductions
Day*

MONTH 23

April

CLOSE. OF. SERVICE. OMG! OMG! OMG! Take a chill pill, dude. It was just the conference. You still have time. Time to prepare for re-entry, time to finish out your projects in Armenia, time to get to know your neighbors better, time to figure out your upcoming plans, and time to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—READ THE NEWS

Did you take a break from world news during Peace Corps? If so, it's time to get back into the realm of knowledge. The following are some good news sources:

- * <http://www.bbc.com/>
- * <http://www.nytimes.com/>
- * <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

You could not have done this alone. Think of all the people who have helped you along the way, and show that you appreciate what they have done for you. Think of Peace Corps staff, counterparts, HCNs, other PCVs, your spouses, parents, siblings, and friends. Ways to show appreciation include:

- * *Say thank you to them in person, over the phone, or with a letter or card*
- * *Give them flowers*
- * *Make them a scrapbook, or knit them something*
- * *Print out memorable pictures for them*
- * *Host them for dinner or bake them something*

Enjoy Armenia's spring flowers. They are gifts which go unappreciated by many HCN's. They are not WEEDS if they bloom and brighten your day.

2

*National
Peanut Butter
and Jelly Day*

4

Tell a Lie Day

8

*Draw a Picture
of a Bird Day*

14

*Look up at the
Sky Day*

22

Earth Day

MONTH 24

May

Who are you, again? I think I used to know you, but you have changed so much...Yes, that's a good thing. You are much more patient than you used to be. You can take any disappointment and not let it ruin your entire day. Your acting ability is superb. Apres, du! How else have you changed? It might be interesting to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—DO a SELF ANALYSIS

How have you changed? Go through past journal entries. Look at old photographs. Talk to people who know you. Think about how you view the world now, versus before Peace Corps. What knowledge have you gained? What have you taught others? How do you spend your free time? What qualities do you think you'll take back to the states with you?

Spend time thinking about all this, and writing it down so you remember all the interesting things you experienced and the ways you changed during Peace Corps.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—RECONNECT WITH FRIENDS

Send your old friends emails and facebook messages. Plan what you'll do together when you are reunited. Find out what is new in their lives. Exchange pictures. You don't want to go home and be blind sided by all the things that are different. Catch up now, so that you have time to process and think about how you will fit into each others' lives when you get there.

Plant a pot of flowers or a small flower garden. Leave something of beauty for your landlord or host family.

6

No Diet Day

9

Lost Sock
Memorial Day

10

Clean up Your
Room Day

12

Limerick Day

31

World No
Tobacco Day

MONTH 25

June

Ok. Now you can panic. Just kidding! There's no need for that! All you have to do is take advantage of everything: every coffee invitation, every excursion opportunity, every souvenir shop, every chance to transfer skills to HCNs, every beautiful day, every photo op, every meeting with your host families... Definitely, this month...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—BE COMPUTER FREE

Go out and enjoy Armenia! Talk to your friends and neighbors! Give technology a rest! Stay away from your computer for at least 2 hours every evening. If you don't do it now, you never will, and that's a scary thought.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—SHOP FOR SOUVENIRS

You don't want to go home without mementos of your time in Armenia. Because we were living here, it was hard to think like a tourist and buy souvenirs. So now is your chance. You have a very good idea what will say "Armenia" to you, every time you look at it. So go out and buy it!

Also think about your friends and family back home, and any special occasions you may be invited to upon your return. Stock up now on cool gifts for birthdays, weddings, and baby showers.

1

National Go Barefoot Day

7

National Chocolate Ice Cream Day

15

Smile Power Day

18

International Panic Day

23

National Pink Day

MONTH 26

July

America is on your mind! And why shouldn't it be? You will be back in one month! Are you ready? Do you have any idea what you're returning to? Talk to the newly-arrived PCVs for some insight into what they just left behind. Use them, and the Internet to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—STUDY UP ON POP CULTURE

Read everything you can think of in the news for info on what you will come back to, once you reach the U.S. Listen to popular songs. Find out what celebrities are doing. Research clothing styles. Practice dancing, American-style. You're American. Get yourself ready for re-integration!

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—LIST YOUR DESIRES

What are you really excited about doing in America? Of course you can't predict how you will react to reverse culture-shock, but you can dream about how you'd like your re-entry to go.

Make a list of:

- * People you are excited to see*
- * Restaurants you want to eat at*
- * Clothes you want to buy*
- * Places you want to visit*
- * Activities you want to do*

3

*Compliment
Your Mirror
Day*

12

*Different
Colored Eyes
Day*

13

*Embrace Your
Geekness Day*

14

*Pandemonium
Day*

25

*Threading the
Needle Day*

MONTH 27

August

Shnorhavor! You made it to COS! Yowza!! Could we be any more proud of you? No. You just accomplished something amazing, and you should be proud of yourself. Now is the time to...

CHALLENGE FOR THIS MONTH—Say GOOD-BYE

It may be a long long time before you see these people again. And some, (you have to face it), you will never see again. Make a point to visit those you want to say good-bye to. Stay a little longer over coffee. Eat a little more than you normally would. Be a little nicer, speak a little more, show them in all these little ways that you care about them and that you are going to miss them terribly. Take pictures, exchange gifts, and promise to keep in touch. You are becoming an RPCV and leaving behind a legacy.

ALTERNATE CHALLENGE—GIVE AWAY EVERYTHING

You have no more need for just about everything in your apartment. May as well make the next PCV or your favorite HCN happy. Plus, it's that warm, fuzzy feeling you get inside...

6

*Wiggle Your
Toes Day*

10

Lazy Day

15

Relaxation Day

23

*Ride the Wind
Day*

27

*Just Because
Day*

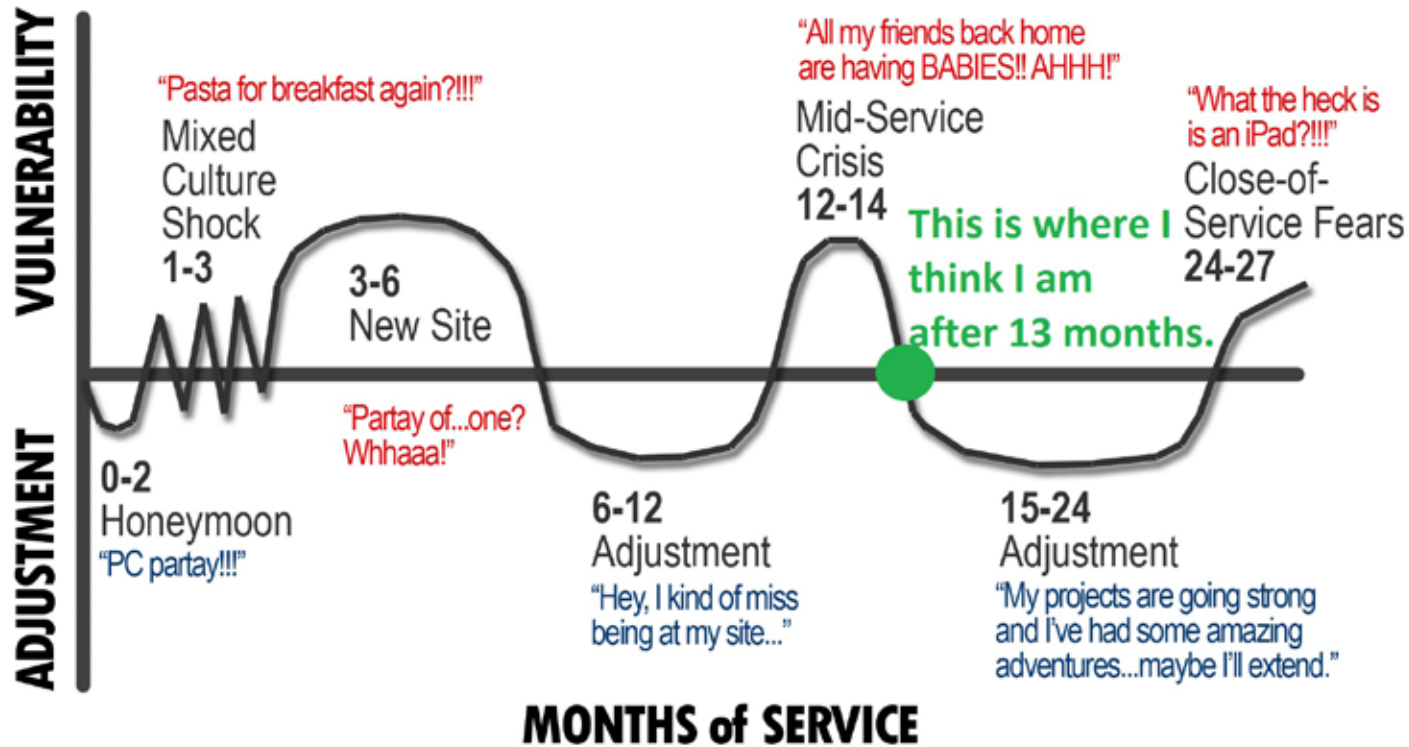
Critical Periods In The Life Of A Peace Corps Volunteer

You will note that the behavioral reactions listed below all tend to be negative. This is NOT meant to imply that your PC experience produces only difficult, unhappy emotions. It's just that when you're feeling "on top of the world," you don't look for changes. Given, however, that PCVs spend their 2 (or more) years in a foreign culture, the likelihood of ups and downs is more common, and normal. This diagram was put together by a group of COS-ing Volunteers in Senegal in the mid-80's; it is applicable wherever you are. Take care of yourself!

MONTH	ISSUES	BEHAVIORS/REACTIONS	INTERVENTIONS
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departure from home • Arrival in-country • Disorientation • Health concerns • Self-consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Loneliness • Feeling Incompetent • Nervous about personal changes over 2 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team-building encounters • Social events • Establish routine • Maintain links with home • Develop interests and positive habits
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much structure • Too much routine • Group constancy • Fatigue • Impending affectation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal • Anxiety • Restlessness • Irritability • Low tolerance for frustration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore independence • Visit "veterans" • Make plans for first 3 months • Visit future site • Establish relationships with PCVs and staff • Gather skills for immediate use
3 - 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment • Separation/solitude • Uncertainty of role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fright • Frustration with self • Loneliness • Weight and/or health changes • Homesickness • Uselessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop in-country correspondence • Host visitors • Visit peers, other PCVs • Establish links: NGOs, services • Technical research for future use • Language study • Establish routine, sense of "I" • Hobbies to do "in public" • Simple projects: garden, trees
7 - 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow work progress • Language plateaus • Cross-cultural frustration • Culture shock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison with others • Over-zealousness • Homesickness • Uncertainties about adaptation/abilities • Intolerance with host culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reunions: talk with other PCVs about their experiences • Communication with home • Simple projects: crafts, meetings, classes • Consolidate HCN friendships • Review this sheet on changes

MONTH	ISSUES	BEHAVIORS/REACTIONS	INTERVENTIONS
11 - 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-service crisis • Doubt about program, role, self, government • Various obstacles over time • Reflection: disillusionment, confusion in resolving frustrations vs. victories • New trainees arrive • Holiday/vacation/break 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impatience with self, program, system • Place blame on the program • Constant complaining • Lethargy • Haughtiness with new trainees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holiday planning/Mini-vacation • Review work plan; set new goals • Celebrate one year anniversary • Develop new recreation options • Write long-lost acquaintances • Explore better in-country relationships • Self-study on additional technical or language topics
16 - 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased and more defined work pace • Project work • Awareness of time constraints • Realization of own limitations • Post-PC considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyperactivity or apathy • Procrastination • Self-recrimination • Resignation • Disappointment • Downgrade achievements • Over-identification in behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit new Volunteers • Physical activity: "Get in shape" • Focus on relationships at site • Re-examine goals and time frame • Apply for GRE, write graduate schools • Explore work possibilities locally or in-country
21 - 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for COS and post-PC activities • Depression about perceived lack of accomplishment • Anticipated separation • Demanding work pace • Consideration of extension, post-PC options • Acknowledgment of unmet goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monument building • Withdrawal into work details • Panic • Procrastination • Frustration with self • Moodiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacation/Travel • Review work plans, assess feasibility • Plan "closing out" and follow-up • Work with counterparts on same • Collaboration with 1st year PCVs • Consider Post-PC: resume, graduate school applications • Give quality time to relationships
23 - 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma of Departure • Concerns about social re-entry • Bridging new and former identity • Redefinition of career goals • Redefinition of host-country based on relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fright • Confusion • Alienation • Anxiety • Panic • Giddiness • Impatience • Obsession with planning and scheduling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check on trends, US popular culture with new trainees • Do self-analysis: identify factors of self and work gratification • Work on self-image • Shop for arts, crafts, souvenirs • Write friends, make social plans • Post-PC travel plans • Transfer skills and knowledge to Trainees • Arrange for gifts for host family

CYCLE OF VULNERABILITY & ADJUSTMENT



WEBSITES

- * avc-agbu.org/home.php—Learn Armenian
- * nanowrimo.org—Write a Novel
- * ted.com/talks—Watch Inspirational Talks
- * livespace.com—Set Goals
- * lettermo.com—Write Letters
- * freerice.com—Play Free Rice
- * scriptfrenzy.org—Write a Script
- * youtube.com/watch?v=X4L5nDDgEEk—Make Origami
- * youtube.com/watch?v=X4L5nDDgEEk—Make Origami
- * khanacademy.org—Free Online Courses
- * coursera.org—Free Online Courses
- * danoah.com—Interesting and funny stories from a single dad
- * mrmoneymustache.com—About saving money and lifestyle choices
- * peacecorpsjournals.com—A collection of Peace Corps blogs
- * petetorolashomelesspage.blogspot.com—My grandma's blog
- * www.idealists.org—Job Searching
- * didyouknow.org/handwriting—About Handwriting
- * viewzone.com/handwriting.html—About Handwriting
- * hundredpushups.com—Doing Push-ups
- * peacecorps.gov/resources/returned/hotline—Peace Corps Hotline
- * linkedin.com—Linked In
- * nonprofit-jobs.org—Non-profit Jobs
- * jobs.goabroad.com—Overseas Jobs
- * www.bbc.com—News Website
- * www.nytimes.com—News Website
- * www.huffingtonpost.com—News Website