

Life in Turkey

(Editor's note: Former Ione resident Terrie (O'Connor) Higel recently returned to the United States after living for two years in Turkey. Following are her observations about living there and the differences she notes between the U.S. and Turkey.)

"Probably the biggest difference is conveniences," says Terrie, who, with her husband, Duane, and their 11-month old son, Matthew, lived in a 24-unit apartment complex in Eskisehir, a small town in the central part of Turkey.

Terrie says Americans don't realize how well off they are - not until they must go without electricity from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. every day. "It was conservation. There just wasn't enough electricity," she says. The hot water was heated with gas and, at one point, she says her family went without gas and hot water for two weeks because the gas just wasn't available.

Terrie says that although Americans rarely have to face shortages of light bulbs, tea of coffee, Turks accept the fact of shortages. "It's part of their life," she says.

If you want to buy an appliance, you just walk to the store and plunk down your money, right? Not in Turkey. "You sign up and wait for one," says Terrie. And when it does come, it's expensive. "A small stove can cost you from \$400 to \$500."

Another difference Terrie noted is the amount of time Turks spend watching television. They don't spend a lot of time watching. In fact, back in the states, her son, Matthew, was unfamiliar with the tube.

"They show old movies," she says with a laugh, recalling a John Wayne movie in which Wayne spoke in a high-pitched-dubbed-in-Turkish voice. "It's really funny watching the Muppets speaking Turkish." Other shows she saw were Dallas. "It must be played everywhere," and Woody Woodpecker.



Terrie, Matthew and Turkish mementos

What did she and her family do if they couldn't gather around the TV at night? "We read a lot, played Scrabble and gammon," she says.

She and Duane also had Turkish friends they visited. One such visit also taught Terrie the attitude men have toward women in Turkey.

"We were all standing around talking after dinner one time," she recalls. "The men all gather in one group and the women in another. I began to discuss politics with a Turkish woman and the men stopped their conversation and stared right at me. Women don't discuss politics in Turkey - they just talk about home and the children."

Neither are women allowed to buy just anything they want at the store. "The large purchases are always made by men," says Terrie.

And even though she says the climate in central Turkey is similar to that in this area, women do not wear cool clothing outside. Shorts? "Never," she says. "And I always made sure my shoulders were covered when I went outside."

Terrie says much of her shopping was done in open air bazaars, and that "everything" is bargained for. The rule of thumb is "go under 25 percent of what was asked."

"There were lots of fresh fruits and vegetables," she says, and although she and her husband had privileges at a nearby military exchange (he worked with the Turkish Air Force as a field service engineer for McDonald Air Craft) she usually bought her food, especially meat, at the bazaar. Meat was only "about \$2 a pound for steaks you could cut with your fork."

The medical care in Eskisehir was very good, says Terrie. Matthew was born in a military hospital, and the birth was without drugs or preparation. "Totally natural," she says. "But you have to take all your supplies, like gowns."

Although there were political changes in the country while she was there, (the military took over and the country was without a president for six months), she said she never experienced any anti-American sentiment.

"They (the Turks) asked a lot of questions about the United States. They were very interested in our country," she says. She was asked questions like: "Do boys and girls take chaperones along on dates?" They do in Turkey. "How can poor people own TVs?" "That was hard to explain because poor has a different meaning there than over here," she says.

But Terrie says the Turkish people are very patriotic about their country. "They believe they have the best."

She says with the political instability in the country, with the leftists and rightists fighting, the army finally took control. "The army patrolled the streets constantly. When I got off the plane there were soldiers pointing machine guns at everyone, but we got used to that after awhile."

She says curfews were imposed from 12 a.m. to 5 a.m. everyday and no one could go out. She said one day a curfew was imposed from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. to take the national census. "Children weren't even allowed outside to play. I can just imagine Americans being told to stay home," she says with a smile.

"People here don't know how good they have it," Terrie reflects. "I didn't know what a great place this was until I left it."

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