

Hey Saadet. By the way, that's a very pretty name. I looked it up on the internet and it means "happiness." Anyway, it's really hot here. Like cooking eggs on asphalt hot. I bet it's really hot over there too. See, that's why I like the cold weather better. My dad always says that you can escape the cold by staying inside or wearing warmer clothing. But what are you going to do against the heat? Walk around naked? Carry an air conditioner on your back?

Either way, my name is Alex and I'm from your neighboring country. The one on the left. First of all, thank you for the letter. It's great to hear from someone living on the other side of the border and to see your perspective on the conflict. I read your letter, and I agreed with everything you wrote regarding peace and the value of human lives.

I'm very happy to see that you share my desire for peace and harmony between our two countries, and an end to the bloodshed and tears. And while history must never be forgotten, we shouldn't cling to it, but rather learn from it to build a better future. Armenians know this quite well too. So, let's put the history that you and I did not have a hand in writing, and focus on the history we can make.

I'm 23, by the way. I go to college. I like to drink with friends and have fun. My favorite food is khinkali, and I'm so happy that we're neighbors with the country that makes them. Do you like Georgian food? Do you guys have Georgian restaurants over there? Please agree with me that khinkali is the best thing ever. The funny thing is, we have more traditional Georgian restaurants here than Armenian. How about over there? See, we like to gossip about each other, about Georgians as well, but that still doesn't mean we can't enjoy their food, right?

I lived abroad for all my childhood. I had many friends of different ages, mentalities, shapes and sizes, and, of course, ethnicities. And my best friend was a guy from Azerbaijan. I met him when I was 11 years old and we became very good friends. We spent a long time together doing the stupidest things that came to our minds, and we got into a lot of trouble for it all. But we had a lot of fun, and we never let the conflict get in the way of our friendship. We sometimes got into arguments, but not about the Nagorno Karabakh conflict; about things like what movie to watch or what game to buy, or who gets the last chicken wing (he was a little bigger than me, so he'd always get the last chicken wing). Things dumb teenagers would argue about. Things you probably argued about as well when you were younger.

At the end of it all – regardless of where we were from, what color skin we had, what language we spoke, what music we listened to, what kind of propaganda was fed into our brains – we were just kids, and we just wanted to be friends. Just like you and I right now.

But it's been seven years since I last saw him. We've still kept in touch, but it's just not the same. And only three years after I left my friend and returned to Armenia, I was drafted to serve in the military. I spent two years reliving the same day, counting down from 730 days, or 104 weeks, or 24 months. If you have a relative or a friend serving in your army, could you ask them how they count their time in the military? Our guys would tend to draw a phone battery on their belts and slowly fill it up as time went by. And once the battery was fully charged, it meant you

would be demobilized. I would be really interested in knowing how your soldiers count their days too.

The military left a big impression on me and I still have vivid memories of it to this very day. I still remember all the good times, but unfortunately, the bad times are always a little more abundant. In fact, as I play the clarinet, I was taken as a musician to different events, and unfortunately, seven of them were military funerals where I had to perform with the military band. And one of the sounds that still rings in my ears is the crying. Specifically, the crying of the parents. While I always have this cynical belief that people cry just to put on a good show, nothing can squeeze all the blood out of your heart like a parent crying for their dead child.

They were crying, begging the yellowed corpse to come back to life, refusing to put it in the grave, and they looked at other soldiers with a terrifying stare. I always thought it was unfair for their children to die in a conflict they had no role in starting. And I can imagine that the same happens in your country as well. It's truly unfair to take the lives of people who haven't even spent two decades in this world. And if there is any reason for a peaceful resolution, it should be to end all the funerals and all the crying.

And I've never liked funerals and crying. The sound of crying gets on my nerves.

Instead, I like hearing people laugh. In fact, I believe laughter is the most human thing we do.

So, enough with the sentimentality. Here's a joke that me and my Azerbaijani friend used to tell each other all the time: a Georgian, an Armenian and an Azerbaijani walk into a bar. The bartender says: "Get the hell out."

Alex

P.S. If you want to keep in touch and hear some more terrible jokes, here's my email: