

## Friends From Estonia

This past weekend was very special. We had friends to stay. What made the weekend special was that, at the beginning of their stay, we actually didn't even know them. This unusual situation started back in June. There was a knock at the door, and when I opened it I found a blonde, young man, with a shy smile, and an armful\* of books. "Hello," he said in an accent that I couldn't exactly place. "My name is Mikhail. I wonder if you have five minutes for me to show you these books that I'm selling." I didn't want to buy any books, but neither was I in a hurry to do anything else, so I asked him to come in. It turns out that he is from Estonia, and has spent the Summer going from door to door, selling educational books made by a company called South Western. Mikhail was charming and friendly, and immediately attracted the attention of my children, who proceeded\* to crowd around him and ask all kinds of questions. Well, he showed me the benefits of using these books during my children's school years, and how they help to prepare them for exams, including college entrance exams. I decided to take the plunge\* and buy them. He told me that they couldn't be delivered until the beginning of September, and that he would personally bring them to us. Fine. Well, Summer came and went, and the last thing on my mind at the beginning of term were books. I received a reminder card from him about his return, but because baseball season is here, and we are up to our eyeballs\* in practices and games, I forgot all about Mikhail and the books. Then, a few days ago, he turns up as he had promised, with our set of books and Dvd's. He looked tired. He still had a car load of books to deliver, and time was running out. It was 100 degrees that day, some of his customers hadn't paid yet, and he didn't even have a place to spend the night. My husband and I agreed that they could stay with us. We have a roomy, spare lounge which the kids use as a playroom. It would be cool, comfortable, and if they got bored at night, they could always play with the kids action figures.... They quickly became part of the family, infact, we were all disappointed to see them go. We talked about our countries and cultures, about work and families. In a week, they will go to New York, as a reward for their hard work. They also have the chance to win a trip to another country; those who sell the most books get to go. Mikhail's friend, Olev, who stayed an extra day with us, told us that this kind of Summer work is very hard. It forces you to grow up, become industrious, to persist even when you get a lot of negative responses from people, and to learn self control. These are qualities that he hopes to use in his career back in Estonia. They told us that their Summer experiences were completely varied. "I have been bitten by dogs, and had a gun pointed at me," said Mikhail. I laughed in shock when he told me that. "But in contrast to that," he continued, "we've stayed with some really kind host families." I hope they experience kindness for the rest of their trip, and perhaps, one day, they can show us around their home towns in Estonia.

Related expressions: an armful of, to proceed to, to take the plunge, up to your eyeballs.

1. He walked through the door with an armful of potatoes; the harvest has been good this year.
2. The birds flew into the orchard, and proceeded to peck at the cherries.
3. We took the plunge and bought the house. It wasn't cheap, but we can imagine staying here for a long time.
4. I'm up to my eyeballs with bills; it's really too much.

