

Update 27 – written December 27, 2013

Revolution: Thank you to the many of you who have asked about how I am doing with all the upheaval that is going on in the country. I am fine. The capital of Kiev is located at the other end of the country from where I live – 16 hours by car or an overnight train ride away.

Distance helps, the upcoming holidays also distract but you also need to keep in mind that where I am there is a mostly Russian population (vs. Ukrainian). Thus generally there is more of a sway towards Russia then towards the EU and therefore no reason to protest in Crimea.

I have been living low (quietly). Any political involvement on my part would not help a thing. I do not mean to sound cold or unfeeling but, this situation is not a surprise to God. I have a lot of feelings about the situation but one feeling trumps them all...time is short.

This may be the last Christmas, last Easter, last summer of religious freedom in this country. God has been very merciful to Ukraine. She has had 21 years of religious freedom. But those who lived through persecution for their faith during Soviet times say the flame of faith was hot then; hardly comparable to the cooling coals of today.

Time is short. While we still can we must continue on...working, telling, reaching out...because there will come a time when it will become much more difficult than it is today. Oh that I gave God my all.

Clinic: Our clinic here where I live started up a little later than usual this year. For the past bunch of years the clinic closes down during the summer months as the building houses tourists. Not tourists in general but rather believers from all over Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. The congregation swells each summer with guests, many coming for several years in a row now.

After the tourists left we were blessed to have some much needed repairs done. The clinic building was built about 15 years ago and basically nothing has been done since. Some repairs to the cement walls, a new paint job and new linoleum made a pretty difference.

But, in good conscious I can't just leave my most difficult wound patients for 2 months without help. So, the weeks I was home during July and August, I continued to see a few selected patients. Or, at least that was my plan. The very first week Pastor Misha got a call from a stranger who demanded, "I know you have an American nurse. I want to see her! I am from St. Petersburg and I came to Crimea to see her."

Misha and I both kinda shook our heads over that one. Of course I saw him. Then as the weeks waned on one patient would tell another, who also brought their friend and....you get the idea. Blessedly God continues to work in me on patience and seeing the picture with His eyes. Improved language skills and scheduling more loosely has also brought my stress level way down.

I learned recently of changes taking place in Ukraine's health care. While it is labeled 'Reform' in reality the country is sinking to new depths of corruption within medicine. What things have always been like since I've been here have at the least been discouraging and at worst scary. What is happening now just makes me sick. The only blessing I can see at this point is that because of the marked contrast it makes Christian medical caregivers more sought out than ever.

I could easily list off a slew of reasons why they **shouldn't** even exist but God has protected, blessed and provided for each of the church clinics that I work with for one reason only – His glory. Oh that each would continue to love God and humbly serve.

How do they know? There are no signs, no radio or newspaper advertisements for the ministry God has given us. The only way people hear about the church clinic is by word of mouth. I often ask a new patient, "How did you find out about the clinic?". The stories they say fascinate me. "The lady who sells meat pies at the town hospital told us about you." "A lady that goes to this church

told me about the clinic 3 years ago but I was too embarrassed to come until now.” “My friend brought me.” “The nurse at the hospital said, ‘In Premorski is Kristina. She gets people back on their feet again.’” “You helped my neighbor.” “My surgeon said you had good supplies.” By invitation we go to the house bound, otherwise by bus, train, and car or by foot they come...all walks of life but one thing in common - they heard that there is help here.

Why do they come? They come because they have a problem that they can't solve on their own. They come for what they can get – help and free supplies. When they don't need help or we have run out of supplies – they stop.

What do we do? We always start with teaching; helping them to understand why the problem exists, what needs to be done to solve or decrease it and the rationale behind both. Over time we may need to remind them of the instructions or correct a misunderstanding. Perhaps due to carelessness or believing a lie, with some a reprimand may be needed. And, with a few we just have to release them to experience the effect of their choices.

Glance at it from His angle and the parallels are so similar. How do they know? We, the Body of Christ, are called to be the road sign, light house, bridge, hand of mercy that points to The Way. Every person in the world has a problem that they can't solve on their own but few know The One who is able. They can't know unless they hear...so speak.

Why did I come? Am I not the same? I plead with God for my expectations to be filled when I want something. But, when I'm doing fine, He is set aside. My relationship being as superficial as that I have with a grocery store; I need. I come. I get. I leave. Do I love God for what I want out of Him or for who He is?

What does God do? God is teaching always teaching. He is the Great Teacher and uses every single situation to grow His students. At times, lessons are repeated because I need to be reminded. Other times I've allowed pride to cause problems again and I am disciplined. And sometimes, in love, He lets me go to experience the effect of my rebellious choices. But, He waits with merciful forgiveness for me to turn around and

come back again.

3 very heavy bags: I was mentally ready for the grumbling comments from the bus drivers about my luggage. But I had paid properly for it all and everything was important - so I stood my ground through the griping.

The Sevastopol bag had - diapers, catheters and dressings for my paraplegic patient; ostomy bags for my oncology patient with a colostomy and all the ingredients needed for English club. The Berdansk bag had a birthday gift and my contributions to Thanksgiving dinner with my teammates. The third bag had more gifts and my own things. I felt like a cross between Santa Claus and the Red Cross :)

Sounds weird to say... but it seems that I baked my way through my road trip. In Sevastopol I made Carmel corn for the English Club outreach (that was a hit!); cherry rolls and tapioca pudding for the folks I was staying with (both full time workers so something homemade was special to them) and pumpkin pies and cinnamon rolls for 2 families in Berdansk. Baking **doesn't** sound very missionary but it was a real way I could bless those around me.

God judges what we give
by what we keep.
G. Mueller

Christmas: While my 15 day trip was fun and less work than I expected, I could feel inside that I was very tired. No one's fault; **wouldn't** go back and change a thing but rather just the result of a busy year.

Typically our first blast of winter comes Thanksgiving weekend here and it did again this year. I traveled home during a pause between precipitations and was happy to 'hole up' during the light snow and freezing temperatures. Our system, however, **wasn't** as harsh or as long as most of America. It has since warmed up again and for the past week Feodosia has had blue skies and temps in the high 40's! not like the brr the folks have up north.

Unlike last year (when I was fully absorbed with a couple patients), I decorated the house for Christmas. A slower schedule

and Christmas music has done much to refill my bucket. The 24th was an intense clinic as we will be closed on the 31st and the 7th for Christmas. Therefore, on the 25th I celebrated quietly at home. Made cookies to give away, opened cards I had received, watched a Christmas movie and called home.

The hustle at the market advertises that our holidays are just around the corner – decorations, Christmas trees, gifts, masks, party clothes and food galore. New Year's is the biggest national holiday in Ukraine; followed by Christmas, then Old New Years. In short, the party starts Dec 31st and continues until Jan 19th!

“There is an old story of a king who went into the village streets to greet his subjects. A beggar sitting by the roadside eagerly held up his alms bowl, sure that the king would give handsomely. Instead the king asked the beggar to give him something. Taken aback, the beggar fished three grains of rice from his bowl and dropped them into the king's outstretched hand. When at the end of the day the beggar poured out what he had received, he found to his astonishment three grains of pure gold in the bottom of his bowl. *‘O that I had given him all.’*”

Quote from Elisabeth Elliot

The King came by this year, you gave and I want to say thank you. For your prayers, financial support, cards, emails, gifts, medical supplies, Vacation Bible School supplies - for all the seen and unseen things you did in the Name of Christ for the people in Ukraine – thank you.

By giving back what He first gave us, we were used as a ‘bridge’ of sorts to equip national Christians who are actively pointing people to Christ. Equipping has many faces...from facilitating 2 Christian Medical Conferences for students, an evangelistic camp for the disabled, translation of materials, 27 Vacation Bible Schools or 3 faith building hikes for teens; supplying dental instruments for Christian dentists, promoting communication between a stateside church and national pastor, supplying medical & ostomy supplies for 3 church clinics helping 100’s of people, supplying vitamins to the Christian Rehab Center; medical supplies for a paraplegic evangelist, blankets to a home for the elderly, craft supplies for 31 VBS’s...all of this and more were tools; tools that Christians in Ukraine used to point people to Christ. Thank you!

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