

Introductions: I'd like to introduce you to some folks who I often refer to in my letters – a picture dictionary of sorts. Due to technical difficulties, I sent the photos in a separate email. It isn't quite like meeting them face to face but it's a good place to start.

**Yuri and Sveta** – Are the Ukrainian couple from whom I rent. They remodeled their attic providing me a 1-room apartment. They both invited Christ into their lives when they were in their late 30's. Yuri is a born builder and Sveta is gifted in hospitality. A hobby of his is fishing and for her sewing.

**Jamie** - Has been serving as a missionary for over 20 years; first in Russia, and since 2007 here in Ukraine. She asked God to be Lord of her life when she was 21. She grew up in Nebraska as the oldest of 11 children. She served as a Crime Scene investigator for 18 years on the police force in Omaha, Nebraska until a short-term mission trip to Russia changed her life. Jamie is passionate about evangelism and is an excellent Bible Study leader.

**Malone Family** – are from Oklahoma. When their 5th child, Eli, was born with Down's syndrome in 2004, life for them was no longer 'business as usual.' During several short-term mission trips to Ukraine, Chris and Mary noticed the plight of orphaned children with handicaps in this country. They felt God leading them to adopt a child in 2008. It turned into 4 Ukrainian kids (then ages 5 – 6) over the next 35 months.

While in Ukraine in 2011 adopting Ethan, they felt God's calling on their lives to serve as missionaries in Ukraine with a focus on reaching out to the families with special needs children. They arrived in February 2012. In February 2015, they had to return to the States because one of their boys (Ethan) needed health care that was unavailable to them in Ukraine. Ethan's health stabilized and they returned about three weeks ago. Chris is a gifted worship leader and has a pastor's heart. Mary has more patience than all of us combined plus the huge Barnabas heart of an encourager.

**Tanya K.** – Special Need Ministry Leader. Tanya is married to a wonderful man by the name of Sergi and they have 3 children. Their oldest daughter is married but Vlad, age 15, and Nastya, age 13, are still at home. Vlad was born with a half of brain but with God's intervention in his life he has accomplished what the doctors said he never would – like talk, walk, read and write. What the world would label

as a misfortune, God used for His glory. Simply because Vlad is who he is over 200 families with special needs children have heard the Gospel.

Tanya would describe the ministry God has given her like this – ‘It is a boat with 2 oars. One oar is Evangelism and the other practical help. One oar without the other is like offering a crust of bread but withholding the soul saving Bread of Life; or, like sharing the Gospel to a man that is drowning. Both oars need to be used in tandem for the work to move forward.’ God has given Tanya an immense capacity of compassion and the tenacious zeal that all would know of Christ’s redeeming love.

**Tanya S.** - English Club Leader - For Tanya it was a simple as concluding – ‘God has given me the gift of languages so I will use it to draw others to Him.’ Already for many years now, Tanya has been using the English language as an Evangelistic tool through the church. For the past couple years, the English Club outreach starts in September and goes through May with a special week long outreach during the summer. It is open to anyone and for all skill levels. The leadership team members are all believers with the same vision. About 50 people come each Saturday and I think it would be safe to say that at least 60% are from outside of our church.

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**Jody** – January started off in a fun way with a visit from a long time and dear friend. I met Jody some 14 years ago when she was still a missionary in Crimea – working with street kids. Today she serves 8 months a year as a ‘on field’ counselor/member care to missionaries for another organization. Then 4 months a year she serves as a counselor at a retreat center for missionaries. We really didn’t anything big or special...it was just neat to have some unscheduled time to be together.

**Crimea** – I began working on my trip to Crimea about 2 weeks ago. I saw a 3-week opening around Easter so planned to use that time frame to follow up on last year’s Vacation Bible Schools and see friends. But, due to the political situation, I will not be going.

Besides the resent flare up in the East, I came to understand that I would be taking some serious risks. If I flew in, there was a very high risk in not being able to return to Ukraine (because I will have broken a Ukrainian law that says that the

airspace over Crimea is closed due to Russian occupation). If I drove in, I would enter through a check point that is not accustomed to foreigners, thus there would be serious questioning by the Russian guards and from then on I would be followed thus putting all my friends at risk.

So, for my work here and the sake of my friends there, I have had to let that hope go. I sound all calm about it on paper but it was very disappointing.

**English Club** – On the 21<sup>st</sup> we started back up after Christmas break. One reason I left Oregon when I did (not staying until after Christmas and New Years) was to be in place and ready for this part of my ministry. From now until the end of May, I will be teaching 2 advanced English classes every other Saturday. In one class we focus mostly on communication/speaking. In the second class I include more grammar, reading and a little writing. I had 8 students in one class and 10 in the other. The range is wide - from an elementary student, university student, elementary school English teacher and business manager for an international company.

To keep the conversation God honoring I have chosen a theme each week. For example last week we talked about Success & Failure. How did they define these words? What gifts could be found in failure? What problems could come with success? How does the Bible define success and failure?

Tomorrow, after another icebreaker game and a worksheet on 100 other words to use in place of *good*; we will talk about Revenge & Forgiveness. I'll be using a clip from the movie 'Les Miserables' – where the convict is forgiven and how that one act of mercy changes his life.

### **Days ahead....**

This coming Sunday I am starting something I've never done before and am as nervous as I am excited. After church each Sunday I will be leading a small group, in English, through Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren.

This all came about because both Tanya S. and I ache to see spiritual growth, the book has been translated into Russian and the English Club leaders expressed a desire to have a chance to improve t

# 1. Yuri and Sveta



2. Jamie, far left



### 3. Malone Family



4. Tanya and Sergi K.



5. English Club leadership team (and their kids) Tanya S. is on the far left with paper on her lap



6. Jody & I waiting for spring!

