

## Update 20 – written March 6, 2013

“ A Norwegian fisherman with his two sons went on their daily fishing run. As usual, the mother went down to the wharf to see her family off and wish them a safe return and good catch. By mid afternoon the waves were rolling higher than usual. A sharp, brisk wind whipped the spits of salty spray into the faces of the rugged man and his teenage boys. The wind increased; and the waves grew like humped, marine giants of a prehistoric day. The waves caused the little boat to toss and pitch as the three rowed desperately to get back to shore. The fierce storm put out the light in the lighthouse on the shore, leaving the fisherman dependent upon dark groping guesswork.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen of their rustic cottage, a fire broke out. Before the wife and mother could put out the fire, it destroyed their every earthly possession, except the clothes on their backs. Finally, the father and sons were able to row the boat safely to shore. Waiting on the beach to tell them tragic news of the fire was the wife and mother.

“ Karl,” she tearfully said, “ fire destroyed our house and all our possessions. We have nothing now.”

But Karl seemed strangely unmoved by the disconcerting news.

“ Didn’ t you hear me Karl?” Our house is gone.”

“ Yes, I heard you,” he replied, “ but a few hours ago we were lost at sea, riding high waves and death seemed mighty close. Our only guide to the shoreline, the light in the lighthouse on the cliff, went out. For an hour I thought death would be our lot. Then something happened; a dim yellow glow appeared in the distance. Then it grew bigger and bigger. We turned our boat and rowed with all our might to get in the path of that light. When we did, we followed it safely to the shore. You see, Ingrid,” he explained, “ That little yellow glow was the first sight of our house burning. At the peak of the blaze we could see the shore line as bright as day. The same heat that destroyed our house created a light which saved our lives.”

By Charles Allen

“ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8: 28

“Her skin is raw and she is in a lot of pain. Can you see her?” It was Dr. Ludmilla calling but it was impossible for me to see Vemera. The request came last October right between the two women’s retreats. I simply couldn’t do one more thing so I asked a bunch of questions gave my recommendation and scheduled her to come to my first clinic after the retreats.

Pain, fear, exhaustion and questions....were written on the face of this lady of Muslim background who was slightly older than me. For the past month and a half since surgery, Vemera had coped with an ileostomy. As usual for here, she had received no education in the hospital for her situation; had spent too much money on pouches that wouldn't stick, stayed cooped in her house changing rags and hadn't yet slept a full night due to stool burning her skin.

Thanks to God's provision, I was able to treat her skin and get her into an appropriate pouching system. With her pain and fear relieved, I started asking questions and cringed inside when I figured out what she still hadn't. All her signs and symptoms added up to death within the year.

It is not standard practice here for the doctor to tell the patient the full truth. At best, the doctor will tell the family but not the patient. Over and over this has put me in a difficult position because all of me inside screams to be 'truthful with hope' with my patients. The fall afternoon sun made soft patterns on the wound room floor as I wrestled inside – to tell or not. I don't remember all I said but I do remember hearing myself say – 'In this bitter news is a gift. Those who die in a car accident have no chance. You have been given a gift – a chance to say good bye.' Through the fall and winter, Vemera came on occasion for supplies but in January it became too difficult and Dr. Ludmilla and I began going to her.

I would learn later was that Vemera's husband had died 10 years ago when their only child was 2. During one of my visits her daughter was home and we were introduced. As I tried to wrap my mouth around her name, I asked what it meant. She didn't know but with 12 year old curiosity, she popped over to her computer, 'Goggled' it and much to her delight found out that her Arabic name means – Life.

Vemera heard about Christ's saving love through me, Dr. Ludmilla and through Pastor Misha at the Christmas tea I held for all my ostomy patients. Blessedly, her sister – a Tatar who had invited God into her heart and life many years ago – came from Germany to be with her in February. And, it was through her that Vemera invited God into her heart and life. 7 days later Vemera died.

I wouldn't wish advanced metastatic cancer on anyone and yet, like in the story above..."*The same heat that destroyed our house created a light which saved our lives.*" The 'heat' of cancer brought the most important question forward –Where will you spend eternity after you die? – and the blaze saved her soul. Life saw the difference - the difference in her believing aunt; the difference in her mom. But Life is young and was placed in the home of a Muslim relative to finish this year of schooling. I think about her often, pray for her and hold to the truth that God has a special place in His heart for orphans.

**5, 4, 11 and 6:** The gas meter reader lady showed up at my door the other day and

after I told her the number on my meter she exclaimed, “You have been baking!” I grinned knowing that I had far exceeded the usual monthly 10 cents worth of gas that I usually use. I couldn’t quickly figure out how to explain cinnamon rolls in Russian so I just told her that it wasn’t quite ready yet but if she came back later that afternoon she could have some.

After five pies in December, four Pineapple Upside down cakes in January, eleven pans of Cinnamon Rolls in February and six batches of Chocolate Chips in March, I finally figured it out. Yes, it is cold outside and the oven makes my apartment snug; yes, my schedule is a little slower so I have some extra hours but that isn’t why I bake. I bake because it makes me happy. After the last update and now hearing about Vemera, you know some of the textures that are woven into my life. In the need to balance the weight of these hard things, I pull out the mixer. For me baking brings joy, prettiness, throws my brain into creativity, I relax in doing something familiar and there is a sense of a completed project. And, as my mom pointed out, the outcome makes others smile because I give it all away...well most of it anyway : )

**The Silver Chair:** I had been itching to see their latest performance but responsibilities had prevented me from going to Sudak. A couple phone calls had things arranged and I took off by bus for a 4 day weekend in early February. Like  $2 + 2$  always = 4; me + Sudak always equals fun! I allowed myself to drop into the flow of life there and got to see their dress rehearsal, attend a Bible Study, be a part of a village Sunday School, go to church and of course see their most recent production of the C. S. Lewis Narnia series – The Silver Chair.

Christian theater is the main evangelistic tool for this small church of 90 and this fall they will celebrate 10 years of puppet/live theater outreaches. While most of the cast are in the youth group, in some way or other nearly every member is a part of the ministry. Because they take this seriously, behind every production is months of work, headaches, backaches and sacrificed school breaks. As a result, every production is better than the one before and this has opened doors for evangelism otherwise closed to the church. You are a part of the ministry as well, because a lot of the fabric, ribbon and other decoration type materials you donate end up in their hands. Through you, God also provides financially for such things as props, lights and a sound system. Thank you! The only thing left is for you to come and see it for yourself!

**Birthday:** It started on the 19<sup>th</sup> when I began receiving Happy Birthday emails and ended on the 23<sup>rd</sup> when two friends invited themselves over, made me a cake in my kitchen and we had tea before I had to head out the door to see a patient. Text messages, phone calls, cards in the mail, an almost surprise lunch at Pastor Nicholi’s house (Dr. Ludmilla accidentally gave it away in her excitement of being invited), flowers and gifts made the day special. I felt very loved on.

About a month ago, the decision cemented in my mind and I knew what I wanted for my

birthday. Since the women's retreat Shied's widow, Adelay, has been on my heart. I just wanted to spend time with her and that ache had been pulling on me. Now with winter dissolving away I decided to go for it and I called to ask, 'Could I come for 4 days?'

Perhaps it is the paradox that struck me most of all – mud, cold, dreary weather outside but inside us it was warm, sunny and blooming. The unforgiving clock of village life chores and yet, like her plastic mushroom clock on the wall fixed on 5:55, for us time stopped. Our back grounds and what had come our way in life could hardly be more different and yet in matters of the heart we could finish each other's sentences. Nothing really happened and yet our worlds were wonderfully changed. What gift from God – to both of us.

**Annette:** As per our sorta regular custom, my teammate came down for the day the last of February. I look forward to these get togethers as it's a day with a change of pace and a catch up with each other- in English. Living an hour apart, with very different ministries and busy schedules keep us from seeing each other more often. With Annette it is super easy to just chat all day. However, the last 2 times she came, we talked as we tied polar fleece blankets for her kids and they turned out cute. Annette has been good for me and perhaps a day out of the house has blessed her as well. I admit I'm gonna miss her a bunch as they (her husband David and their 2 kids) will be leaving for a 6 month furlough in April.

**Spring:** When the calendar flipped to March last week, I could sense the change. It is as if Feodosia has woken from her winter slumber to realize spring has slipped in. Blades of green are cracking the ground, green shoots and swollen buds can be seen on the bushes & trees and the under-the-snow flowers (you call them snow drops) are out. Granted yesterday started with blowing snow that changed to sun through snow that changed to clouds that changed to sun again with a cool flag fluffing breeze. We have the saying, "March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb." Here they say, "March is capricious like a woman. " Lions, lambs or ladies – so the weather changes every 5 minutes - AT LEAST ITS SPRING!!!!

While our Easter isn't until May 5, yours is coming up. Attached to this update is a 31 days before Easter devotional. I thought you would enjoy this collection of quotes with a short message written by missionaries, former missionaries, Board Members and staff at the Christian Missionary Home Office. I was invited to submit and you will find my devotion on March 25<sup>th</sup>.

Blessings,  
June