

Update 6, written March 8, 2016

“A little bit of faith will get your soul to heaven,  
but a lot of faith will bring heaven to your should.”

C.H. Spurgeon

### **It's a Party!!**

"It all stopped about a year and a half ago when the sponsor could no longer provide." For the past couple months, I have tried to meet with Tanya K. about once a week. It is a time for me to ask my questions, time for us to pray together and to talk about plans. It was on one of these days that she told me about the quarterly birthday parties. Turns out there was a time when quarterly they would hold a big birthday party for all of the special needs kids who had a birthday within that 3 month time frame.

My first thoughts were, "Sounds fun but also expensive & time consuming." So I asked Tanya why she had held these functions? "For several reasons, Kristina. First, it is often the first time the parent has crossed the threshold of the church door. Second, the moms appreciate the special attention given and geared toward their child. As one mom explained, 'If I hold a birthday party for my daughter at home all that happens is the adults drink alcohol and the other kids play together. My child sits there forgotten.' Third, the moms and kids get to meet each other. Fourth, even a birthday party is a way to share and show the love of Christ."

Well, long story short, I got it. On the platform of a neutral event they enter the building and see that it is not a weird or scary place; relationships begin or are strengthened and this increases the possibility that they would come again to other functions such as Christmas & Easter outreaches, evangelistic summer camp & small group Bible Studies. We agreed that we would try it again for one year (4 parties for a total of about 170 kids). I would be responsible for decorating the hall, game ideas and covering the cost of the cake and party supplies. Tanya's ministry fund would cover the cost of a small gift for each child. A local professional entertainment group agreed to help for free for an hour at each party. And, each mom will bring some cookies or candy.

My goodness I was nervous the morning of Feb. 26th! There was decorations to put up and tables to arrange and set. Would there be enough of everything? How would the entertainment be? How was this all going to work out? Bless their hearts, 3 moms had committed to help in setting up and we got to work. Within 2 hours we had transformed the fellowship hall into a brightly colored room and right on time the characters from the movie 'Frozen' arrived. I couldn't believe it - Anna, Elsa and Olaf showed up and did an amazing job interacting with the kids. All in all a very fun day! Tanya was pleased. Thank you for your prayers!

### **My birthday**

With my just arriving a few months ago, I didn't expect there would be much ado for my birthday. But, I was wrong :) The Friday night Bible Study group that meets in our

home presented me with a beautiful cake and lovely Ukraine embroidered sweater. Saturday the 20th was a busy day with Rainbow (speech therapy for the special needs & small group time with the moms) from 1 - 4pm and English Club from 4 - 6:30. None the less I was given several bouquets of flowers and boxes of chocolate. Even friends from Berdansk schemed with friends here to have flowers delivered. On Sunday I was handed a homemade cake, more chocolate and, along with three other people, was congratulated in front of the church. On top of all this I received many cards and emails from friends and family so I'm feeling very loved even at 51!

## **Era**

We've been close friends for some 10 years now so ever since I returned to Ukraine, Era and I have been watching for a window of time to get together. This happened last week....a kind of chance to see each other & catch up, mini retreat for her and my opportunity to introduce her to Tanya K and the ministry here. Classic to just who she is, Era dove in. On Friday she shared her testimony with our Bible Study group. She lost her first son when he was 5 related to hydrocephalus and this had a direct impact in how she and her husband came to Christ. On Saturday she helped us get ready for the birthday party and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know our kids. Sunday we attended church, grabbed a bit to eat afterwards and, enjoying the warmer weather and a few unschedule hours, we slowly walked through the park on our way home. Monday was used to plan for my upcoming trip to Berdansk. Then on Tuesday, before Era left, we got to meet with Tanya again so that they could share ideas with each other.

Because Era and Tanya have so much in common, I have wanted these 2 to meet ever since I arrived. Just as I suspected they hit it off and it was fun to watch each of their world's stretch to include the other and the gifts they each have. I'm not sure what all is going to happen, but God's hand is in this and I'm just glad I have a front row seat at the 50 yard line : )

## **Remembering....**

On this day, one year ago, I flew out of Portland, OR on my way to Crimea. It was a scout trip, to answer 3 questions. "Lord, are my days as a missionary done? If not, am I to return to Crimea (now occupied by Russia)? Or, am I to relocate to upper Ukraine and if so, where?" Why the questions? Because 2 years ago, on March 1, 2014, I fled my home in Feodosia, Crimea. The Russian military was taking over the peninsula and I understood God telling me to get out that day.

On that day, March 1, 2014, in essence, I ran from the known into the vast desert expanse of the unknown. It was a year of grieving, questions, resting, healing and choosing to trust. A year and one week later, March 8, 2015, was the start of a 4 month road trip. After spending 6 weeks in Crimea visiting everyone I worked with, I went to Ukraine for 8 weeks. At the end of this trip, in July, I presented my findings and thoughts to my team. On November 13, 2015 I returned to Ukraine relocating to a suburb outside of Kiev.

Today, March 8, 2016, as I go back through the memories it seems so so very long ago.

I feel different than who I was 2 years ago. It has something to do with that I have walked through the emptiness of a desert and swam through an ocean of emotions...somehow when you pass through a very difficult time, something is taken from you...you feel older, worn and a bit weary. But, also something is given to you...understanding...and somehow there is much richness in that understanding.

The 3rd Sunday after I had arrived here, I remember sitting among still strangers during worship and wondering what I most felt like - an arranged marriage, an orphan or a graft? Now, 4 months later, in all three ways I have been taken. This new church has reached out and accepted me...and, as I did in for 15 years in Crimea and the past year & half in the states, I will put my roots down here, for however long the Lord allows.

### **Coming up**

I would appreciate your prayers as I will be traveling from March 9 - 18. I will go by train south so as to visit the 2 other church clinics that I work with. My prayers are for travel safety; health; wisdom and obedience.

Below is simply something I wanted to share with everyone. I found it while reading 'Broken down house' by Paul Tripp.

The cross of Jesus Christ is the complete definition of love. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are also called to cross shaped love. But, in practical terms, what does it mean to be an instrument of love?

**It means not keeping yourself so busy with you and yours that you have no practical time to love others.**

**It means being committed to knowing people, because you can minister only in very limited ways to those whom you do not know.**

**It means being willing to have your life complicated by the needs and struggles of others.**

**It means being willing to share your physical resources with others.**

**It means being willing to live with an open home.**

**It means being perseverant and patient even when the love you give is not returned.**

**It means actively looking for places where you can function as one of God's tools of love.**

**It means resisting the temptation to be judgmental, self-righteous, and critical.**

**It means overlooking minor offenses and fighting the temptation to become bitter or cynical.**

**It means making life decisions out of a recognition of the inescapable call to love.**

**It means being lovingly and humble honest in moments of misunderstanding;**

**more committed to reconciliation than to being right.**

**It means admitting that you are still learning to love as you have been loved.**

**It means being willing to own up to (admit/agree that you have) your sin and admit your faults.**

**It means not judging the success of your life by the size of your house or bank account, or by the quality of your car, but but the quality of your love for God and others.**

**It means regularly examining the motivations, desires, and thoughts of your heart in the mirror of God's Word.**

**It means moving beyond simply surrounding your self with people whom you find comfortable and likable.**

**It means being a student of God's Word, a joyful participant in the means of grace, and committed participant in the fellowship of the body of Christ, so that the love you offer other may be increasingly pure and mature.**

**It means being willing to be misunderstood, mistreated, and misrepresented for the sake of incarnating Christ's love.**

**It means overcoming evil with good.**

**It means not letting race, social class, gender, age, or ethnicity get in the way of a biblical call to Christlike love.**

**It means being willing to have your schedule and plans interrupted or altered.**

**It means being willing to grant and seek forgiveness.**

**It means paying attention to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the people God puts in your path, and looking for ways to help them bear these burdens.**

**It means believing that God will not call you to a task without giving you what you need to accomplish it.**

**It means being willing to get up earlier and stay up later.**

**It means learning the details about someone's struggle so that you can love wisely, while at the same time guarding the reputation of the person you are loving.**

**It means weeping with the one who weeps and rejoicing with the one who rejoices.**

**It means being willing to endure tense and uncomfortable situations lovingly.**

**It means not allowing yourself plausible excuse the seemly free you from love's call.**

**It means making a commitment to being a faithful friend.**

**It means being willing to take on big things, even as you humbly admit your limits.**

**It means keeping your promises and being faithful to your word.**

**It means being open to correction, loving criticism, and godly rebuke.**

**It means believing in the body of Christ and recognizing that you are but one of the tools in God's big toolbox of redemption.**

**It means being open to counsel and receptive to advice.**

**It means being willing to go to bed tired and to awake to another day of calling.**

**It means hiding God's Word in your heart and keeping his Kingdom always before your eyes.**

**It means refusing to become anyone's substitute messiah, but instead to point people to the presence and grace of Jesus.**

**It really does mean looking out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

**It means building relationships, not just for the purpose of being relationally comfortable, but so that those relationships would be a workroom for redemption.**

**It means loving people in such a way that they never feel like they are in debt you.**

**It means remembering that you are more like than unlike the people you are called to love.**

**It means understanding that the call to love is a call to both word and deed.**

**It means daily remembering Jesus, being in awe of the gift of his love, and living thankfully.**