

Update 30, written June 22, 2014

4,600 miles Oregon – Washington – northern Idaho – Montana – Wyoming - South Dakota – Nebraska (& Wisconsin) – Colorado – southern Idaho and back into Oregon. It was a 30-day trip characterized by a relaxed schedule, secondary roads and spontaneous stops to check out strange sounding signs & small town main streets.

The trip began building itself last fall when I told my folks I wanted to go back and visit relatives in Nebraska during the first part of my furlough. Being able to drive offered us the chance to stop and see many friends & family. With time on our side, it was great to be able to hug and catch up with so many that I haven't seen in several years!

An unexpected blessing was just being distracted. My mind had been so consumed by my unplanned departure, hurting heart and a zillion unanswered questions – that becoming absorbed in something new and pleasant was good for me.

Besides visiting & sightseeing, I also had the opportunity to attend the National Christian Medical and Dental Association Conference. With how it all came together for me to go, I expected something BIG to happen there. I got to meet some neat people and the conference was very good but nothing BIG happened...at least in the way I expected. Rather it was one sentence in the main speakers talk when he said, "I understood God was calling me back but I didn't understand why." I can't really explain why but those words brought me peace and it felt good to hear that someone else didn't understand either. So kinda like a puzzle piece that snaps in to complete another section...I came away the better for it.

2 weeks after getting back from the road trip, I was packed up and off again.

19 days in Ukraine

In his book *The Insanity of God*, Nik Ripken (pseudonym) shares the story of a Russian pastor sent to a Siberian prison because of his faith. His wife and children followed him there to support him in his suffering, and they too suffered. One night, the wife and three children ate their last bread and rested in the knowledge that they were about to starve to death if God did not provide. _That same winter night God spoke to a church deacon 30 kilometers away and

told him to get out of bed, hitch his horse to a sled and carry food to the starving family. The deacon then argued with God that it was too cold and too dangerous. God continued to command him to go. The deacon then exclaimed that there were wolves out there that could eat his horse and then eat him as well. _“I’ll never make it back!” he cried out. _The Holy Spirit then spoke to him clearly, “You don’t have to come back. You just have to go.”

Last November, when I was mapping out my upcoming furlough, I planned to return to Ukraine for about 3 weeks to help with the Christian camp for the handicapped that would happen in June. So so much had changed since I had bought those tickets! Now, with the Russian occupation of Crimea I could not help with the camp. Yet, still, there were things I could do.

I could bring in very needed funds, visit 2 of the 3 church clinics and bring out 2 suitcases of my stuff that already waited for me in Kiev. In other words, I had the tickets, the time and reasons to go but was it stupid?? Would I get eaten by ‘wolves’?

I prayed a lot about the trip, asked my team, wrote several missionaries in upper Ukraine and made several Skype calls to national friends. When I left Oregon on May28th, I had peace in my heart that I was doing the right thing. My parents had peace as well but by the time I had reached Frankfurt I was afraid. Too much reading the paper, too many newscasts and already 12 hours of flight time to mull things over had me turning inside. As I debarked the plane in Germany I was mentally planning how to turn immediately around and get a ticket home.

As the Christian Medical and Dental Association April ‘14 devotional shares, we are geared to evaluate risk/benefit ratios. We evaluate problems, our solutions to those problems and calculate the potential benefit versus harm. By weighing the risk against the benefit, we come up with a decision that produces the best chance of good with the least chance of bad. _And we carry this line of thinking into our personal lives and into our lives of faith. _“God asks me to do this with him. What will be the consequences? How much the cost? What will it do to my work, my income, my relationships, my reputation, and my family? I know where God is pointing but I hesitate, so that I might be certain the benefit is worth the risk. What if I never make it back?” _

So there in the Frankfurt airport, I had to come to terms with ‘the wolves’...the What if’s...the possibility that things for me could go very badly. I had had peace about the trip but now I was reconsidering - was the benefit worth the risk? What if I never made it back?

And then I remembered the devotional, “*You don’t have to come back; you just have to go.*”

And I am SO glad I did!! Of course I am glad that things didn’t go badly for me. But, I am equally glad that I chose not to let fear control me, for a still deeper trust I now have in God, the joy I have in obedience and the thrill of being able to see so many friends again!

Dear Lord, When it comes to my relationship with You, help me not weigh the risk to benefit ratio as it relates to I, me and my. Rather, Lord, keep teaching me to weigh Your will alone.

Even if I had pages and pages to try and explain, I couldn’t because I don’t understand it myself. I only know that the country is in turmoil and everyone I spoke with has more questions than answers. Yet as messy as the situation is there, for me the trip was very healing. Somehow in being able to walk Independence Square (where the protests began last November in Kiev) – to see it, smell it, and touch it – somehow helped me. To be able to see so many friends in upper Ukraine and hear their stories – somehow helped me. And, to be able to call into Crimea by phone and hear the voices of people dear to me – helped me as well. I came in one person and left another – somehow more quiet inside and back on my feet. I am very grateful to God for the gift of that trip.

And?

So, you ask, what are your plans? What is next? Are you going back? I still have to answer – I don’t know. On one hand it is far too early to make a decision. You can see on the news that fighting continues on the eastern border. Beyond that is the layers of chaos in Crimea. Believe me I would really like to know how things are going to unfold but for now though I need to be patient and wait with expectation that God will make things clear. For now furlough is my work at hand so that is what I am focusing on.

Ministry continues!

While in Ukraine, it was fun to be able to talk with many of the pastors I

work with and hear that yes, they are moving forward with summer **Vacation Bible School** plans. Pastor Peter, Pastor Vova, Pastor Bogdon, Pastor Igor, Pastor Artur, Pastor Mark, Pastor Dima...they all asked me to relay their thank yous to you for the provision of funds and craft supplies.

The weeklong **Evangelistic camp for the handicapped** ended Friday. There were 30 kids (the majority in wheelchairs or with walkers) and 30 caregivers came and a staff of about 20 to help. It hurt not to be there with them but my heart was thrilled to hear that it went on despite so very many obstacles. I know nearly all the staff, so I can tell you that God brought together some of the best of the best for this outreach! I am grateful to God for His provision through you. Our ministry was able to give about 1/3 of the total final budget. Thank you Lord!

During my visit I was able to catch up with each of the **church clinic** outreaches. While I could not travel into Crimea, at least we could talk by phone and the staff caught me up with all that had gone on. In God's mercy, they received all of the boxes of medical supplies that had been sent. With these they had enough to supply the needs of the patients with wounds and ostomys as well as supply the needs for the handicapped camp. As we understand it today, due to the Russian occupation, we will not be able to send more medical supplies into Crimea. However, since this clinic closes during summer anyway, we are simply going to wait and see how things go politically before making long-term decisions.

I was personally able to meet with the other two church clinics in upper Ukraine. Both are working as usual and are still able to receive the medical supplies we send. Thank you Lord!

Prayer –

I know many were praying for me during **my trip** and I want to thank you for that. God chose to answer with an overflowing cup of blessings – safety in travels, health during my trip and no problems when I went through customs. I was able to accomplish all that I hoped to.

While I couldn't enter Crimea, God arranged it so that Crimea came to me. At the beginning of my trip, Pastor Nicholi and his wife were able to travel without difficulty to see me in Kiev. Later I had the very unexpected blessing of getting to meet up with a group traveling from Crimea to Kiev for a conference – including Pastor Nicholi (Feodosia), Pastor Misha (Premorski), Pastor Benjamin (head pastor of all Crimea)

as well as the pastor of the church where the handicapped camp is held. I treasured the time we had to talk.

Thank you for your continued prayers for wisdom & courage for **Crimea and Ukraine's pastors**. My prayer is that they stay focused on God (not politics) especially during these difficult times. I witnessed the divisions happening back in March when I was still Ukraine. From what I hear, the fissures are deep. Satan is effectively using politics to divide the House of God. So, again pray for the pastors and the Body of Christ – that God remain first in their hearts.

I am still thanking God for how He got the craft supplies over the boarder despite the occupation – without a single box missing. May God bless those who I asked for help and took on the task of dividing all the supplies up and getting them out to all the pastors. And, now I am thanking Him in advance, for how He will provide funding for each of the 25 **VBS's** this summer.

In closing I would ask for your continued prayers for Crimea and Ukraine. Because I do not know people who live in the region of fighting on the Eastern border, like you I know only what I see on the news. I did hear a lot of stories (none good) about the area but because nothing was first hand I don't know how close to the truth they are. In regards to what is going on in Crimea, however, about this I know much more. What I heard from my friends is that...

- Food, gas and medications have doubled in price.
- The people were told that while the Russian Ruble was being introduced, the local currency would be honored until Jan. 1, 2015. That was abruptly changed when it was announced that after June 1st of this year the local currency (grivna) could no longer be used. Then exchange rate between the two currencies was poor so everyone lost much value in their money.
- Yes, there is food but little choice because no Ukrainian brands are allowed in and few Russian ones are available.
- Medications are scarce. Even basic medications are not available. I don't know all the reasons why.
- It can take 3 days to pay your utility bill for your home because the offices are not yet organized. But they are organized enough to penalize you if you pay late.

- The main canal that supplied irrigation water for the peninsula has been shut off leaving orchard groves and local farmers dependent upon rain. As we traveled towards Kiev by train, Pastor Nicholi and Pastor Misha commented several times as to how green Ukraine was compared to the already dry Crimea.
- Banks have not been working since March. So besides no way to do transactions, those who have money in the bank cannot get to it
- No legal transactions can be completed – i.e. buying, selling, births, deaths contracts etc.
- Crimea has been reduced to 2 trains into the capital (Simferopol)...where as it used to be 5 trains a day. The cost to travel from Crimea to Kiev was 340 while I was there. The day I left it went up to over 1,000.
- Everyone has heard border-crossing stories – having your stuff taken from your car or even having your car taken from you makes you think twice before traveling. Crimea is very dependent upon tourism for their economy but at least this year fear alone is preventing people from visiting.

Please pray – that the people in Ukraine and Crimea would humble themselves before God; that the leaders would have a true fear of God so that God would be glorified in this land.

Days ahead –

In July I will be sharing in Eugene as well as Portland. I am looking forward to these Sundays - see the calendar below. Then the 3rd week of July I will fly back to Indianapolis. This will be a full week at the CMF Home Office. I am eager to see and meet with my Ukraine team as well as take part in the furlough retreat.

August I am taking ‘off’ so as to spend time with family and be ready for a busy fall schedule.

I personally invite you to come to any of the following churches. On the Sunday’s listed below, I will be sharing about our ministry together in Ukraine:

July 6 Gilham Community Church Eugene, OR 3633 Gilham Road
97408

July 13 Tigard Christian Church, Tigard, OR 13405 SW Hall Bv. 97223

Sept. 7 Trent Church of Christ, Dexter, OR 38029 Wheeler Rd. 97431

Sept. 14 Shasta Way Christian Church, Klamath Falls, OR 5835 Shasta Way 97603

Oct. 5 Brookings Harbor Christian Church, Brookings, OR 777 5th Ave 97415

Oct. 12 Noti Church of Christ, Noti, OR 22424 Noti Loop Rd 97461

Oct. 19 Community Presbyterian Church, Cannon Beach, OR 132 E. Washington 97110

Oct. 26 Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, Mountlake Terrace, WA 21428 44th Ave. West 98043

Nov. 9 Twin Oaks Christian Church, Eugene, OR - located at Bailey Hill Rd and Lorane Hwy

Nov. 23 Turner Christian Church, Turner, OR 7871 Marion Rd. SE 97392

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