

Update 24 - written July 27, 2013

It is Monday morning as I write and I am at one of my favorite places in Crimea – Bak-chess-er-rye. The 48 campers have divided up into their respective groups for Bible lessons and I have time to catch up with you.

My 23 day trip to Oregon was wonderful – a huge gift with a zillion more gifts tucked inside! The first 1/3 of the trip was spent in Seaside where most of both sides of the family gathered for my nephew's high school graduation. Blissfully in charge of nothing, I got to just enjoy catching up with family & friends at the various fun and formal events.

I left the coast with a sunburn and headed back with my folks to the farm in Lebanon where I spent the second 1/3 of my time. My week came packaged in more lovely weather and included morning walks with their lab, a day hike into Proxy Falls with Dad on Father's Day, a surprise pie party for me where I got to see many friends, having dental work done, short visits with more friends and sorting through boxes of medical supply blessings. My schedule was delightfully light and allowed for some long & real talk time with family vs. the usual 'post it note' conversations of email.

For the final 1/3 of my trip I headed north by train for a brief but sweet visit with my sister and her family in Mt. Vernon, WA. From there I went to Seattle to attend the 5 day national conference for wound and ostomy nurses. I hadn't been to one of these conferences in at least 18 years and oh man things had changed! I felt rather 'country mouse' amidst the high tech hustle and bustle. There were about 1,900 attending and it was a well done conference. I am grateful for the continuing education through the lectures, I learned new info about dressing products and it was great to catch up with many of the nurses in the NW region.

Good bye was hard. I had so completely un-Velcro-ed myself from Ukraine, been fully present in each moment and thoroughly enjoyed every gift along the way...that good bye was hard. And, I think that is a sign of a great vacation. :) Thank you Lord!

I got back to Feodosia on July 1st and spent the first week getting my days and nights turned back around, held a clinic and went through a batch of humanitarian aid boxes that had arrived while I was gone. By the second week I wasn't waking up at 3 am anymore, most of the most urgent calls/projects had been tended to and I started packing for Bakchesserye.

Update continued 12 days later....

Back in April I had been asked by Pastor Igor if I would come and be the camp nurse for the Christian Camp for Tatar Children the 3rd week of July. I had heard neat things about this outreach to our local muslim people group the past 2 years

and jumped at the chance to join them. In my heart there was no question at all that this was of God.

Besides my tent, blow up mattress, homemade sleeping bag, fat first aid kit, even bigger back up bag...[I was working under the umbrella theory...you know the one....if you have your umbrella with you it won't rain. I figured that if I had all this first aid stuff with me nothing serious would happen...but forgive me I digress ...] camera, extra water and my clothes - I also slipped in Brennan Manning's book 'Ruthless Trust', clueless as to what lay ahead for me.

"It requires heroic courage to trust in the love of God no matter what happens to us"

Brennan Manning

I know that James wrote, 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds...' But I am not there yet. Nope - just not there yet. I was mentally prepared for tent life, outhouse toilet and no showers for 7 days. Once there, I also decided I could cope with the spiders & wasps. This was hardly my first time working as a camp nurse so I knew the territory came with a bit of loneliness and a fair share of responsibility. Nevertheless, I'm thinking that none of the above even came close to what James considered 'trials'. My 'hard stuff' list was rugged but could hardly be called trials. But, by day 3 I hit the wall.

Tuesday night I was in tears - pity party tears because I knew that camp had only just begun and I had already given everything I had. I was empty. (A combination of little sleep, poor quality sleep, answering for the safety of 70 people in a setting where I had very little control and my back hurting from my ambitious attempt to do the day hike at the pace everyone else was keeping). I was exhausted and just wanted to throw in the towel. I knew I wouldn't go home but all of me really really wanted to. The reasons were real but how I handled it wasn't pretty.

In a sense, at that 1 am hour, God 'threw down His glove' and challenged me. *"I dare you to trust Me – just all out, hold nothing back, in everything, every way and every hour just trust Me!"* I'd love to be able to say my response was something saintly but that would be a lie. Rather, for the non-glorious reason of having nothing to lose, I just said 'OK.' And, by His grace, for the next 5 days I did. I trusted Him for strength sufficient. I trusted Him for wisdom. I trusted Him with my body. I trusted Him for language ability. I trusted Him with all that I could not control.

"Trust is our gift back to God, and He finds it so enchanting that Jesus died for love of it"

Brennan Manning

I still only got about 5 hours sleep at night - but somehow it was enough. I never lost my patience with anyone and had emotional energy to interact beyond my nursing role and even play games with the kids. My back pain eased up. I stayed in prayer for the safety of the camp and there was not any trauma that a big band aid couldn't cover. In the one serious event that happened Saturday night - God gave me what I needed to understand and then gave me the correct diagnosis (15 year old boy with a bad gut bug from sneaking into the nearby orchard and eating unwashed green pears). He also gave me language sufficient to calm the people around and I had the antibiotics with me to solve the problem.

I arrived home wiped out but terribly grateful for all that didn't happen. I didn't leave. I didn't lose my patience. I didn't mess up medically. In what I didn't do pushed me into a deeper place....understanding in a bigger way that for me there is only good in all out trusting God. True, I'm still not there yet...that place of 'Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials...' But, by the grace of God, I am at 'Thank you!' Thank you God for trials because I know that the testing of my faith develops perseverance. (James 1:2-3)

St. Abraham Kidunaia spoke to his niece when he rescued her from prostitution:

*"It is not new to fall; what is wrong is to lie down where you have fallen. Remember where you stood before you fell. The devil once mocked you, but now he will know that you can rise stronger than ever before
...do not draw back from the mercy of God."*

The camp in and of itself was very interesting. Besides an occasional clinic patient, I have little direct interaction with this people group. The music, food and language reflected they who they are and I definitely sensed a pride in their culture from the leadership team. It was neat. They were all super busy but I did get to know several of the leaders. Half were Christian Ttr and half were Christian Russians – big heart-ed, hard working group of folks.

While I got to see the kids enjoying the craft supplies that had come through me, my ministry did not financially help with this camp. That is so cool!! You know who did? Well between the parents paying for their child's registration and some support from a local Ukrainian missionary \$1,000 was covered. However the remaining \$4,000 needed for this outreach was given by the Baptist Church's of Crimea! Praise God our local churches are ministering beyond their own culture! I am so proud of them!

Faith + Hope = Trust

Inna & others: I've gotten to be on the fringe of something new this summer and that is facilitating Ukrainian youth to being short term missionaries within their own country. One of the families on our CMF team live in Lviv. Since Ukraine is about the size of Texas the distance between the Mullenix family and myself could be compared to them living in Amarillo and me being in Brownsville. We couldn't be much further from each other and still be in the same country. When we visit each other we both notice significant differences – especially in language, behavior, dress and architecture. The Mullenix's have a ministry among the collage age so, as you would guess, the church they serve with are folks are basically under the age of 30. In an effort to help the church body think outside their own walls, city and region, Dustin challenged them to consider serving God in another area of Ukraine this summer. I'm sure that several did but I had the privilege of getting Inna.

Single, 26, and sunshine in sandals, Inna knows that she has a gift with children. While she had been to Vacation Bible School type things as a child, she had never gotten to serve in one. Via email, I introduced her to the director of a camp that was in need of leaders and of course they hit it off right away. Just prior to my leaving for Bakchesserye, Inna arrived by train. The next day she headed out to the village by bus. Thus, while I was at my camp she was out running the craft program for the VBS in Batalnia.

I had first met Inna when I had visited the Mullenix's and saw her again at the women's retreat we held last October. Yet so far we had not really had a chance to talk. However, because she stayed with me prior to and after her camp, we finally got to know each other a bit and that was a treat for me. Batalnia and I fell in love with Inna's summer sweet personality.

The other instance of facilitation was between Batalnia and Zaparoshja. At the women's retreat last October, Olga, from Batalnia, met Erena, from Zaparoshja, Erena is the daughter of the first nurse I trained in ostomy care at the Zaparoshja Church Clinic. In sharing about her Sunday School & youth group ministry, Olga mentioned that they desperately needed help for this summer's camp. Erena knew her kids were involved in a strong youth group. The only help I gave in this situation was reassuring both parties that this would be a good match. In short, 3 guys and 2 gals came from central Ukraine to work at the Batalnia VBS.

I had a treasured hour and a half with all 6 (Lviv & Zaparoshja) of these youth together at my house and I shot the air full of questions. On one hand I knew the value of being able to debrief with someone safe and who knows what you are talking about and on the other hand, I was simply very curious as to all the feelings they had inside.

“What was something that happened that you just totally didn't expect?”

Overwhelming answer – “The warm welcome and hospitality!”

“Did you have some concerns before you came?”

“Yes. I didn't know what it would be like; the camp; the place where we would stay.”

“I was worried about how my health would be.”

“Would you consider Crimea a different culture than where you live?”

Overwhelming answer – “Yes!”

In this trip, what is a blessing you received and/or a lesson you learned from God?”

“When I first saw the place we would stay I was taken back because it was so crude. But after 3 days I didn't even notice those things that had bothered me at first.”

“It was fun living so rustic – outside showers, outside toilet, pulling the water out of the cistern by the pail.”

“I usually get sick whenever I travel but here I didn't get sick. When I decided to come, I had to trust God with my health. And my health was good all week!”

“I now know for sure that God is calling me to work with children and I look forward to the next steps into this ministry.”

“Because our church is young, I don't know many believers who are older than me. In this trip I was able to meet several believers who are older than me and I learned a lot.”

It was fun for me to hear how close they had all become with each other as well as friendships they had made here and that one gal from Batalnia (Olga's youngest sister) will be traveling up in a few weeks to help with the camp that the Zaparoshja youth will be involved in. I did very little yet in a small way got to be a part of the building up of the Body of Christ as well as support missions at the local level – too cool!

Pastor Nicholi: I will close with a prayer request for Pastor Nicholi. When I returned from Oregon he was just getting out of the local hospital after being admitted for pain control due to kidney stones. He has again been hospitalized this past week for the same thing. However, after 2 attempts to capture the largest stone both ureters are so swollen that he cannot urinate. (Don't ask me

why they went up both because there is no reasonable answer.) The situation is critical and he needs to get to Simferopol where he can receive a higher level of medical care. Please hold him and his wife Nadia in your prayers. I am praying that God would resolve the ureter swelling tonight and open the doors needed to get Pastor Nicholi under appropriate care. Thank you.

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