

Update 23, written September 27, 2107

“Delight yourself in the Lord;

And He will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

A wonderful gift...

The one-year mark of Dad’s death felt big inside and I really wanted to be with my mom on that day. Using my personal funds and vacation days...I got the ok to go. My trip was truly a gift to both my family and myself. I can’t really explain it but even though we were very very busy, somehow in the being together my heart felt better; one chapter closed & a new one started.

It was an opportunity to spend time with mom and help her move; get a medical concern answered; take a mental rest after a busy summer and, somewhere in there, was a chance to say good bye to the place I’ve called home for 44 years

With her being the in the final days of moving, my priority was helping mom and I kept focused on that. Because my purpose was so specific, in some ways it felt more like a short-term mission trip rather than a vacation. Besides family, I saw very few folks.

I had planned to be in Oregon only 10 days but I delayed my return when my doctor asked me to wait so that we could be sure of the test results and treatment. The blessings in these 26 days were many & wonderful and I am deeply grateful to God for this gift!

19 years ago...

The timing of it all made me smile. On September 21, at 4 am I checked in for my return flight. On this same day 19 years ago (‘98) I arrived in Feodosia, Crimea as a short-term missionary.

When I think back on that day I still remember how scared I felt. Then fast forward 9 months and my realizing how hard learning Russian was going to

be for me. And then, at year 2 ½, when God asked me if I was ready to go deeper in my faith? [Which directly translated to – telling me He wanted me to return as a long-term missionary - just when I was mentally preparing to return to the states and be ‘normal’ again!] Who knew I would be still serving this many years later? Certainly NOT me!

Thanksgiving

Ukraine celebrated its first national Thanksgiving ever on September 17th. In light of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, Ukraine’s president has given unparalleled religious freedom in Ukraine and planned 3 huge events in the capital (Kiev). Attended by hundreds and thousands of people, on Christmas and Easter there were interdenominational Christian events held in the main square. The very same place where only 3 years ago the previous president ordered the police to beat university students gathered in a peaceful protest... that was the beginning of the revolution.

In Ukrainian the word translates as – Holy Thanks – and no one knows for sure how many came. But, the estimate is that about a half million people attended the interdenominational Thanksgiving Day event. While no local TV station covered this clearly Christian event, social media DID! The whole country was watching via Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

To get a glimpse of what it looked like you can check this site out -

<http://www.sga.org/2017/09/first-thanksgiving-day-ukraine/>

Especially for Ukrainian Christians who are older than 40, this was a mind-boggling event. It was not so very long ago that kids could be taken from their parents for attending church, that you would be denied your university diploma or career advancement or harassed, interrogated, imprisoned or even killed for believing in God. That they got to see their country unify for national day of Thanksgiving to God in Ukraine – well it was just hard to wrap your mind around!

Harvest Day and a new beginning...

Last Sunday our church celebrated Day of Harvest...probably my favorite holiday in Ukraine. Like our American Thanksgiving, this church celebration stems from gratefulness to God for this year's harvest. Because God chose to send sun and rain in due time, Ukraine's harvest this year was abundant. We had much to be grateful for.

It's a special service with the front of the sanctuary decorated with the harvest – from their gardens the congregation brings all kinds of fruits and vegetables. And you will always see a shaft of wheat and a loaf of bread – symbolizing The Bread of Life – Jesus Christ.

Our lead pastor, Pastor Boris, felt like this was the perfect day to launch a new outreach for the Special Needs ministry - a Sunday evening service geared towards these families. Simply said, each Sunday at from 5 – 6:30 will be a church service where everyone (Special Needs or not) is welcome and during the service the children, will have their own service. For them there will be a Bible lesson and singing and then they break out into activity groups - depending upon their interest and abilities.

Last Sunday evening was the launch day and I was thrilled to see that 130 people showed up. Like the morning service, the focus was giving thanks to God. And, just like we did after the morning service, there was a meal afterwards. It was fantastic to see so many Special Needs families come and the friendships strengthening between them and the Grace Church congregation.

Days ahead -

My days and nights are slowing becoming right side up again. It was nice to return and still have time to get adjusted and caught up before the heavy schedule ahead. Last weekend the evening church service was launched. This weekend marks the start of Friday night Bible Studies & Saturday Special Needs outreaches. Next weekend includes all of that plus starting English Club. Then the following two weekends I will be traveling to 2 conferences (on opposite sides of the country). I am looking forward to these events and also then being able to 'settle in' to our fall/winter ministry schedule.

Actually, I want to tell you about some other photos. Not long ago, many of you received this card in the mail. [For those who did not, I've included it as an attachment below.] I just thought perhaps that you might be interested in knowing who you were seeing.

From top to bottom, left to right

1. 3 year old Losha and his mom Tanya. Losha has 2 older sisters, loving parents and Cerebral palsy.
2. Sasha and myself. Sasha and her mom Vika are new to our ministry and both fun to be with. Sasha has Angelman's syndrome and one of the symptoms of this syndrome is frequent laughter.
3. Showing you his dinosaur, is another Losha - age 4. He and his family are refugees from the war area and he was born with the problem that his esophagus did not connect with his stomach. Due to surgical complications, he has a tracheostomy (he breaths through a hole in his throat). Unfortunately with the trach, it is very difficult for him to talk. To remove the trach here in Ukraine, they would have to cut his vocal cords...leaving him mute. Losha and his parents left 2 days ago for Spain as God opened the door via a Christian organization there for a full exam with the possibility of being able to permanently remove his trach but save his vocal cords.
4. 4 year old Katya is inviting me to play with her and her orange ball. Katya has VATER syndrome. While we don't have exactly the same anomalies, we are 'sisters' by diagnosis.
5. Natasha and Danic (9yrs) are doing our morning silly exercises. Danic has Cerebral palsy.
6. 16 year old Vlad is the son of Sergi and Tanya (Special Needs ministry leader). Vlad was born with only 1/2 of a brain. Neat kid and amazing to realize that God chose to use her son to touch Tanya's heart for the special needs people group. Just because he exists, over 200 families have heard the Gospel.
7. Slavic (orange shirt) and Oksana. Oksana is an artist who is trained in art therapy. She has a passion to help other Autistic children like her son and we

are excited that she will be doing art with the children during the Sunday evening children's program.

8. Era is holding Marina (11yrs). Era is a single mom. Marina has Cerebral palsy and this is the only photo I have where she is smiling. For reasons not yet understood, she seems to be in pain most of the time.

9. Yaraslav (age 7) is Nastasha's daughter. She has Cerebral palsy. While she can't speak, from the photo you can see her charming personality.

10. Liza is 10 and dressed up as an angel because she is participating in the camp talent show we held. She is singing the "Hallelujah" song (and did an amazing job).

11. On the back, I am supporting Vladic's head (Cerebral palsy) while he enjoys kicking around in the ball pool.

Again, thank you for your support that equips us to reach out to the Special Needs community not only through camps but year round. June



The collage features several photographs: a woman hugging a child, a woman holding a child on a blue tarp, a boy in a blue vest holding a toy, a woman with a child in a wheelchair, a boy's portrait, a boy in an orange shirt, a woman in a white shirt, a woman with a laughing child, a child with a large smile, and a girl singing into a microphone.

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"God loves me so that I might make Him — His ways, His salvation, His glory, and His greatness — known among all the nations." — David Platt

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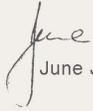
AUGUST 2017

Dear friends,

I am here because God loves me. You choose to give because God loves you. Because of God, you and I were involved in five camps this summer that were instrumental in making His ways, His salvation, His glory and His greatness known to at least 450 people!

Enjoy all these photos from our camps for special needs children!

Making God known
in Ukraine,



June Johnson



"Love is extravagant in the price it is willing to pay, the time it is willing to give, the hardships it is willing to endure, and the strength it is willing to spend."

Joni Eareckson Tada



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