

Ukraine, Through My Eyes

After being the secretary for Gospel Vision Foundation for nearly 4 years, I recently had the incredible opportunity to experience first hand the missionary work that goes on in the beautiful land of Ukraine. As part of a 5 person team, that included director of Gospel Vision Foundation, Darrell Smith and his seventeen year old granddaughter, Emily, we spent nearly three weeks in the very heartland of Ukraine, evangelizing, experiencing the land and meeting its people. For someone who has never been much of a traveler, this was an experience of a lifetime. I pray you will indulge me to share this trip with you and perhaps allow you to see Ukraine in new and fresh ways.

The larger cities of Odessa, Kiev,



Russian Orthodox Church in Kiev

and Yalta looked much like the cities here, but being over 250 years old, had beautiful and intricate architecture only found on buildings of long ago. People scurried too and fro and drove way too fast in the cities and highways. I discovered that driving in this land was a "crash course" (pun intended) in urgent prayer requests, as I found myself asking the Lord for safety and deliverance every few minutes! (The Lord was faithful and kept us safe during the entire 5000 + miles of driving. Hallelujah!)

We saw fast and modern electric trains taking people from one side of the country to the other, but also frequently saw horse and buggies, or old bicycles being peddled, taking folks from one side of the village to another. Cows, geese, chickens and turkeys were seen everywhere in the villages, in front yards to the middle of the road. Goat herders were frequently spotted

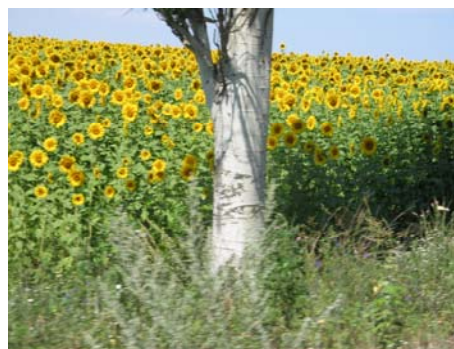
with their little flocks. And the children were the happiest and healthiest children that I've seen in ages. They play outside and run and laugh. It made me sad to think that our chil-



Typical village home in Crimea

dren here in the United States have given up outdoor activities for TV, computers, and video games. I pray that as technology evolves in Ukraine, they will learn from our mistakes and not allow this to happen with their children!

As we traveled from one city to another, I was amazed at the hundreds and hundreds of acres of blooming sunflowers. They looked as if God Himself had spilled His yellow bucket of paint on vast portions of the countryside. I don't know how many pictures I took of these beautiful fields, but they fast became my favorite flower and my photo album proves it!



Sunflower field in full bloom

We visited several of the churches that have been established by our missionaries and were pleased to see that lives all over Ukraine have been changed by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Many of the adults we encountered on the streets of Ukraine

Editorial by Shelly Coleman

are somber and rarely smile, but here, in these homes and churches, it was amazing to see the faces of the adults light up in smiles and love. The love of Jesus had certainly made an impact on these folks.

Emily and I taught in several Day Camps for children with the help of our faithful translators. I wish I could share with you the feelings of love and excitement that poured out of these kids as we were welcomed with open arms. We were delighted to find out that many of these children had already heard of Jesus and knew Him to be their Savior. Still, many other children came forward to ask Jesus into their hearts as the invitation was given.



Emily and the gifted guitar.

Emily had brought along a guitar given to us by a wonderful couple in San Angelo. We used it during the trip and then left it to be used by one of our missionaries in his new church. We were later told that when he was presented the guitar he had tears in his eyes as he praised God for this gift of love.

Some of the most precious of my memories were those of the children at the Nazareth Orphanage in Crimea. The children ranged in age from 3 to about 10. Some had been brought in off the streets, already addicted to drugs or involved in prostitution. These little ones were brought in, cleaned up, de-toxed, and loved. None of them are now addicted to drugs and all have found from first hand experience, the

power of Jesus' love through the work and devotion of the workers at the orphanage. They were so excited to meet us and nearly mobbed us as we handed out treats and toys for them. Two of the sweetest little girls, who were sisters, showed me their room. The room, with 6 beds and one small closet was decorated with handmade crafts. They climbed up on their bunks and carefully took down 2 paper doves they had hung on their walls made with white feathers, construction paper and lots of glitter. They handed me their precious gifts to bring home. The doves are now proudly displayed on my refrigerator at home, but it was their smiles and love that were the best gifts of all. I am grateful for the opportunity to meet these precious ones and share God's love with them.



Orphans at the Nazareth Orphanage in Crimea

Other opportunities for ministry also presented themselves. One of our team missionaries, Uri Swiaschenko, introduced us to a wonderful group home for adults in the Nickolaiv oblast. Here, young adults with various mental and physical disabilities live. They have been shunned by society and had been left to fend for themselves on the streets because of their disabilities. This group home, cares for, feeds, and provides clean housing for them. Rather than allow others to totally provide for them, these young persons, between the ages of twenty to thirty years old, have been given training on how to make beautiful floral memorial wreaths. They make and sell them to the public to bring in supplemental income for the group

home. We feel that this is a worthwhile ministry that we would love to help support!



Dema proudly shows his handmade wreath.

We even had a few miracles occur during our stay. We were driving in a 34-year old car for over 5000 miles, in temperatures near 100 degrees. On our last long drive from Odessa to Kiev, we blew a water pump. We *just happened* to break down at the top of a hill, shaded by a grove of trees, so we weren't stranded in the full sun. It *just happened* to break down about a half mile from a filling station. They just happened to have the correct water pump, for a 37 year old car. Then there *just happened* to be a clear water puddle about 100 feet from our car in which to replenish the radiator after the repairs had been done! We praised God and were able to continue our journey right before the sun set for the evening. With God, there are no coincidences...just Divine Happenings.



Dema Andeev, our driver, repairing the water pump.

Another wonderful occurrence was the change that happened within me. Before we left for the Ukraine, I had been having leaky faucets in my bathroom. I had been grumbling that one day soon I wanted to remodel that room and put in new fixtures, etc, because it was quite antiquated. After this trip I had totally

changed my mind. I was GRATEFUL that I had hot and cold running water, a shower AND a sink in my old bathroom. I was GRATEFUL that we had air conditioning, not only in our homes and work but even in our cars! (*It was quite an experience driving around in a tiny car with 5 people and no air conditioning!*) I even learned to appreciate airplane rides, which before this trip, I was loath to do. But after the wild rides in the car on the roads of Ukraine, I was GRATEFUL to get into the aircraft for the trip home.



Shelly (center) with my new friends, Olga and Eugene

I thank God that I was able to experience this life changing journey. I made some new friends, saw my old friend, Svetlana, our wonderful translator, and am now able to put faces to some of the many names that I see every day at work. I can appreciate the modern conveniences we have here in the States and yet know now that I can live without them. I personally saw that the ministry of Gospel Vision Foundation *IS* making a difference in Ukraine. Usually I'm behind the desk on the sidelines, and only get to see the reports about what's happening there, much as you do by these newsletters. I am happy to report that the Gospel of Jesus Christ *IS* getting told...and that people *ARE* coming into the Kingdom of God, and *ARE* being taught what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and I'm so blessed to be a part of it. I hope this article encourages you as well as you see some of the little things about this land of contrasts, beauty, and life in Ukraine.

Will I ever go back? I don't know. For now I will be content with staying here on the sidelines and maybe planting a garden like some of the beautiful gardens I saw in Ukraine...with vegetables, herbs and yes, lots and lots of sunflowers! †