

Update 7 – written September 16, 2011

All Crimea youth camp – I don't know if it makes you smile or shake your head but once more it was the same song to different music....I was again on my way but couldn't tell you for sure how I was going to get there! God bless Evon, (Dr. Ludmilla's husband), as he has already several times this summer, taken me and my load to the bus station.

So as not to have to transfer buses with all my bags, I chose the direct bus to Bakchesserye on August 22nd and arrived without a problem about 2 in the afternoon. A few phone calls later I was tucked snugly into the camp director's car and as always Igor pointed out points of interest on our way out to the camp ground.

Currently the pastor of the Neshkneegorsk Church is serving as the head Crimean youth leader. Pastor Ruslan had asked that I be the camp medic for the 130 kids – generally ages 13 to 20 something - that would take place this week. Thankfully the worst medical thing that happened was only a moderate size a foot burn from hot water on one of the cooks. She took the situation like a champ and by the end of camp it was well on its way to healing.

'Going Deeper into the Word of God' was the theme and I have personally not experienced a more serious camp. Soon after breakfast we split up into small groups and studied the second chapter of 1st Peter – who we are and what we are called to do. After this we all gathered together for a 2 hour forum looking at the glory of God – reminding us to not completely focus on the gifts of God but rather on God Himself. We had morning and evening worship services with groups talented from voice to violin, electric guitar to trumpet; followed by question & answer time, main message and prayer.

Don't get me wrong it was hardly a monastery – there was all the typical camp stuff with tons of singing, late night camp fires, day hikes to the surrounding cliffs, swimming in the lake, volley ball and soccer championships' and contests to see who could eat the most watermelon without using your hands and who can eat 10 snicker candy bars the fastest without chucking!

I feel very attached to this Christian campground because I've gotten to be a part of Igor's vision since it was still just that. Today the 'lodge' is an open pole barn with wooden benches and a gravel floor; the shanty kitchen sports a literal bathtub for a sink and all meals are cooked on an open fire. The river that runs through camp has a zip line running across it and been partially dammed to create a swimming hole. You don't have to ask the kids to take short showers because with so many people the river water doesn't have a chance to get warmed in the metal tanks by the afternoon sun. In half of the open acreage fruit, nut trees and a vineyard has been planted. Tree houses, army tents and plastic wrapped shanties are your choice of 'cabins.' As rustic as it is, the campground is booked all summer by churches.

In my last update I mentioned that I won't get much sleep. But thanks to Pastor Dima from Sudak, I got more than most. As his youth set up my tent by the river he said, "I didn't know why I brought the extra tent, I just knew that I was supposed to." So I had my own lovely quarters. And thanks to the attentive and merciful camp assistant, I also had 3 wool blankets and 2 *hot* showers! Spoiled aren't I?! :)

Camp for the mentally and physically challenged- Last Thursday I took the quiet morning moment to tell Tanya thank you for coming. My friend had taken a leap of faith in coming to camp and bringing Artom, her 20 year old autistic son. I had explained in detail what it would be like but still I knew that the picture remained fuzzy for her. "Thank you for inviting us Kristina. Thank you." "What has happened this week," I asked, "that you didn't expect Tanya?" She was quiet for so long that I thought she hadn't heard me. Then with tearing eyes and a cracked voice she whispered, "The attention....these young healthy leaders giving so much attention to the children."

I can only understand Tanya's feelings in part because I have not been hurt as 'the least of these' and their parents have. They have been ignored, kicked around, scorned by the world and even treated cruelly by the church. But, for 6 days last week this tired, guarded, lonely group experienced the opposite in every way. In 'surround sound' I saw the orchard give willingly all it had to glorify God and bless another.

In a very real sense, the 140 participants (68 campers and 72 caregivers) were released into an orchard last week to see, pick, taste and enjoy God. The Great Gardener, – master and owner of His orchard - desired to share Himself with them and He did that by harvesting the fruits of the Spirit from the program team, teenage helpers, local church members, medical staff and kitchen crew.

But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self –control. Galatians 5: 22

Love gets you out of bed after only 5 hours of sleep to help a wheelchair bound 20 year old girl get ready for the day. Joy makes you sprint up the hill to help carry a wheelchair bound 50 year old man down to the beach. Peace brings a smile when 3 boys with Down's syndrome are clamoring to get your attention at once. Patience understands that her anger is out of fear. Kindness offers to feed him so that his mom can eat her meal. Goodness prompts you to play peek-a boo with an 18 year old just because it makes her smile. When it would be acceptable to leave him sitting in a chair rocking rhythmically in his own world, faithfulness takes him for a walk and talks with him. Gentleness dissolves an argument between mothers. Self-control calmly answers the same question for the 32nd time.

As believers we are called to bear spiritual fruit -not for decoration or my own desires, rather for God's use. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self – control; even though we did not create it, the fruit is our gift back to God for His glory. Once again it was an honor to serve alongside all of these Ukrainian Christians because they were like a free U-pick orchard open 24/7 to everyone. Their fruit wasn't plastic but real and ripe – sweet and for the taking.

As last time, the participants were about 20% believers and 80% those who do not yet have a personal relationship with Christ. The youngest camper was 3 years old and the oldest in his early 50's. Each day's program started with a wake up work out to words and music that made you wiggle and grin. After breakfast there was small group time where they studied Abraham. There were morning and evening worship services with skits, main message, puppets and songs. Between 2 and 5 was free time when you could rest or join in a trip to the beach, board walk in Yalta or the zoo.

I smiled inside when I understood that Dr. Ludmilla and Era arrived at camp as nervous as I had been the first time. And, just like me, their nervousness melted into joy as they understood the gift that God had given them. For me this camp was different than the one in June. For one, I understood what was going to happen so I felt very comfortable. Two, I was no longer a stranger and began hugging friends as soon as I arrived. Three, I was 1 of an 8 member medical team – so we were able to refer to each other and serve in a very full scope.

Besides Dr. Ludmilla (my colleague who works with me at the Premorski Church Clinic) and Era (my colleague from the Berdansk Church Clinic) a team from the Ukraine Christian Medical Association traveled 5 hours south to serve all week. With them was surgeon/dentist preformed who minor procedures and pulled teeth and he had 2 nurses assisting him. Another member fitted reading glasses and another gave massages. I know I wasn't the only one who didn't want camp to end. Thank you Lord for this gift and the honor of being able to serve and glorify You in this outreach.

Harvest Day- Just a few hours after I got home from camp, I met my second cousin and her husband in Feodosia. Sarah and Andy had already been traveling around Ukraine for more than a week and we were able to spend a good bit of the weekend together. I hadn't seen Sarah in years and never met Andy so it was fun to chatter away in English, catch up and show them around a little. Sunday they joined me for church which was especially fun because Premorski Church celebrated Harvest Sunday. Our closest American holiday like it is Thanksgiving but here there are no football games. There is, however, a grand congregational lunch after the 2 plus hour service of giving thanks to God for His abundant gifts to us again this year.

I saw Sarah and Andy off at the bus station later that day and waved good bye to Era and her husband a few hours later. I admit I was very tired. It was a good summer...a real good summer and in looking back there is little that I would have done differently. But there were some tough spots in it. The buses were so crowded that once I waited an hour and a half at my bus stop

before mashing myself into one. In June I had body lice for nearly 3 weeks. July was so humid that I couldn't get my usual size exam gloves on because I couldn't get my hands dry. I twisted my little foot twice. I 'walked' through the failing health, death and funeral of the husband of my first language teacher and translator. For 6 weeks my upstairs neighbor begged for money and even to sleep on my hallway floor. One unwashed apple put me down for 24 hours. The very worst was when I lost my temper with a patient. So why do I tell you this now? Partly because telling you earlier would have just been whining; but, I also tell you to be transparent. Nowhere is easy and life can seem like one long string of problems but....

"When you trust the Lord, no test is impossible and no failure is permanent." Warren Wiersbe

June