

Update 9 –written December 3, 2011

*“There they all sat glum and wet and muttering. While Oin and Gloin went on trying to light the fire and quarrelling about it, Bilbo was sadly reflecting that adventures are not pony rides in May sunshine.”*

No....not all adventures are pony rides in May sunshine. The past 7 weeks has had its share of trials with 3am alarms to catch the plane; unexpected flight changes; stifling train ride; below freezing weather; many different beds, long days & short nights...but it has been an adventure! The last time I wrote I was swirling around the sucking drain of problems. The next day, it was as if the Great Plumber Himself plucked me out and looking a lot like my teammates, God put skin on, came near and I sank into the comfy loveseat of English speakers; yummy familiar food; listening ears; play; rest and needed advice.

Team meeting - Our CMF team gathered in Lviv (2 days drive from Crimea, drive much more west and you hit Poland) for our annual team meeting. Besides me, our team has 3 families [Dustin & Karilyn + 3 kids in Lviv; Jonathan & Heather + 2 kids who are 5 hours north/east from me; David & Annette + 2 kids who live an hour from me in Crimea]. Due to furloughs and travel distance we hadn't all been together for 2 years. Our time together was a chance to re-cap what has been going on and talk through plans ahead. Phone, email and skype are great but face to face catches the flavor best of all. It wasn't all work though. We big kids went out to eat without the little kids. Another time, all 14 of us tramped down to the local bowling alley and later to the park. And, another day Dustin & Karilyn took us for a walking tour of the city which included a looong break at the local chocolate factory :) )

I enjoy our team and it's interesting to me to hear how God is using them. I came away impressed again how each family's personality & gifts fit their ministry and the area of the country where they live. Reaching students and starting a church in a big city; reaching students in a town and deaf in a region; village life and reaching Muslims in a region and me - all so different and yet perfectly matched. God is so smart!

Conference– At the end of October, I had the privilege of taking part in the 2nd Ukraine International Christian Conference of Young Medical Professionals. Students from a variety of professions including – physician, nursing, pharmacy and dental came together for 2 days. As I wrote to the organizing committee after the conference...“This whole conference should not have happened. It had too much going against it – different cultures, so many out of country guests, more than 300 out of town guests, physical distance separating the schools, leadership team and even conference site, a logistics nightmare, insufficient experience not to mention insufficient funds in hand. It shouldn't have taken place but it did. The conference did take place and not only that the

conference glorified God and pointed others to Him. The conference did take place because God wanted it to. It was done well because you were ready to work hard and be obedient. For what it is worth, I want to say thank you. Thank you for keeping the vision God gave you...'

"Thirty one speakers from 8 countries, 393 participants from 20 countries including 15 Muslim students, all praising God together and learning about the "Whole Person" approach to medical care. "As in my last update I am quoting my missionary colleague, Dr. Jim Peipon. In fact the newsletter that he and his wife just put out talks about the conference in great detail. I have attached it and if you read it while you are online, you can click on the various spots for still more detail. If you look at the end of the article where it says 'click here to view more pictures' you will see me in the 3rd to last photo. The Peipon's did a great job of covering a bunch of details about the conference so I am just going to focus on a few of my personal highlights.

We skyped before the conference – Norway and I - and that is when Tove became a face but at the conference she became a friend. What a gift God had in store for me in this woman! Like me, she is a nurse who loves God and loves nursing. Besides teaching nursing, she also serves as the Nurses Christian Fellowship International Vice-President. Since the two of us were the 'nursing' representative at the conference, we got to hang around a bit together. After the conference the conference organizing committee had arranged for us to meet with the Dean of the Ternopil School of Nursing. Neither of us knew what to expect but it ended up being a warm and interesting experience. Both of us agreed that our favorite time was the couple hours we spent with the nursing students themselves.

I don't remember all the countries that the students come from but I do remember India, Malaysia but African students were the majority. My several previous trips to Africa had prepared me a bit for this group's friendliness and worship style, which are both quite different than Ukraine's culture. But, I hadn't expected the hunger. The hunger of the international students startled me. It seemed that they were literally hungry for learning, fellowship, singing, a smile and encouragement. Only later did stories of racism, language/cultural barrier struggles and years on end without the chance to visit home make the hunger make sense.

I didn't regret one hour that I had poured into preparing for my workshops. I was asked to give 2 workshops on 'Preventing Pressure Ulcers' and one on 'Caring for a colostomy'. Since there were so many good classes to choose from and with these topics being so narrow, I didn't expect the turnout that I had (20+ per class). Thankfully, I had printed more than enough packets for everyone. These are my topics so speaking on them is easy and being able to do it in English was fun. Despite the crowded conditions or the fact that some had to perch their cardboard stoma ('cuss there was no more places to sit), there was no extra talking or distractions. These kids were there to learn and they gave me their full attention. Of course tossing out bags of M&M's for correct answers helped too!

While the need doesn't mean a call, when your heart groans for a people group, that is often the 'field' that God is calling you to work in. Besides the ostomy, injured and handicapped, the conference confirmed again my heart for medical students. To what practical level of involvement does this mean? How does that picture draw out? I don't know yet. I'm asking to God to guide and govern me in this still another field that He is calling me to work in.

Cory & Janice – I arrived home about 11:30pm from the conference, got to sleep about 1 and was on the road again before noon the next day. As tired as I was, I couldn't miss the transportation opportunity to see village friends. Besides visiting mutual friends with them in the 6 days they were here, Cory fixed my computer, water filter, light and gave me advice on my balcony. Janice got food in my fridge, made me laugh and both were willing listening ears. Since I last wrote, my radiator pipe, the heating system, washing machine and my phone have all been fixed. I'm living in a state of deep appreciation! The balcony is the last lonely item on the 'fix it' list.

Zaporoshja – A week after the Lemke's left and full TO DO list later, I too headed out. It wasn't the fun-est train ride I've ever had but 8 hours later me and my 4 big bags of ostomy supplies made it safely to the largest church clinic I work with and that is all that matters. Valentina is the nurse who I have trained to help ostomy patients at this church clinic and she had set up 3 clinic days for me. This church clinic is blessed to have a head nurse at the local cancer hospital who tells all the stoma patients about this outreach. While Valentina had scheduled several folks each day, God had a plan as well and several people just showed up. Each time Valentina and I would just look at each other, smile and shake our heads – how did they know that I would be here on this day at this hour?! Obviously they didn't but God did!

Prior to my visit I had asked if an appointment could be made with the head nurse of the local children's hospital? The Zaporoshja church clinic has been sharing pediatric ostomy equipment with them and I wanted to make sure they understood how to use it. As this request had come from our side (vs. their initiative), I honestly expected a defensive group of 2 or 3 nurses to gather. I was VERY wrong! All the nurses and nursing students were gathered and I found myself unprepared for a group of 20+. It pleased me greatly to have a couple nurses' demonstrate good pouching proficiency.

Over the weekend I had a chance to catch up on the business side of stuff with the clinic's administrator and also attend the village church her husband pastors. God, through my ministry, helps facilitate Vacation Bible School, Sunday School and youth group in their church. But this tiny in numbers but mighty in God church, is growing and also actively involved in reaching out to kids with cancer in their city and the mentally and physically challenged in Ukraine.

Berdansk- A week later, the Zaporoshja Church Clinic sent me off to my next visit with 2 large bags of dressings. Recently they had been given supplies they could not use but we all knew who could. [I must have missed the fine print when I 'signed up' to be a missionary. I mean that part of my job description where it spoke of perpetually carrying bags hither and yon....must have been in like font 6.] Era, the nurse I trained at the Berdansk Church Clinic, was happy to see me and my bags of blessings!

Era had arranged for us to visit several patients that she wanted my thoughts on. We did that Tuesday and Wednesday. The second evening I had the chance to briefly meet with their growing medical ministry team. Besides Era, there is Dr. Ludmilla, Olga who is a medical student and 2 lay ladies (Era & Luba). These last 2 aren't official medically trained but have the God given nature gifting to be fantastic helpers. Together this team reaches out to handicapped children, post stroke adults, and do wound & ostomy care. What an honor it is to work alongside each of these folks.

Thursday was blocked out for Thanksgiving. David, Annette and their kids drove up and we all met at Jonathan & Heather's house. It seems the 4 kids just picked up playing where they left off at the team meeting while Heather and Annette pulled together the classic Thanksgiving dinner. Ymmm! We had hope to watch last year's Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade from last year but that desire was dashed when the electricity went off all day.

Oh well, sitting around talking, eating left over's and playing games was fun – it was a good 'family' holiday.

*"Go Back?" he (Biblo) thought 'No good at all! Go sideways? Impossible! Go forward? Only thing to do! On we go!" So up he got, and trotted along with his little sword held in front of him and one hand feeling the wall, and his heart all of a patter and a pitter.*

2 weeks + 2 weeks + 2 weeks + 1 week = A lot has gone on

While God plucked me out of my swirling sucking mess, He didn't stop the lesson that needed teaching. And, in being able to pull away – somewhere between the team meeting, conference, Lemke's visit, back home, Zaporoshja, Berdansk and this week at home....somewhere in all that, with God's help, a heart change happened.

I had again drifted away. I had let activity; problems and fear of the unknown whittle their way between me and my daily time with my Father. God had let me feel the effect of my choices, come to the end of myself and then extended hands of mercy and grace when I turned around and started walking in His direction.

The world told me I was 46 thus at my prime. I had reached the top. It didn't get better than this. There was nowhere more up to go. I swallowed that lie, settled down behind my bars and prepared to just coast out these last years. Blessedly God, through His people, pointed to the key in my hand. The key was the Truth. The truth is that God has His own time; that everything up to now is preparing me that I might glorify Him in whatever tomorrow holds; that in God it keeps getting

better than this; that there is more up to go and that, as an instrument that chooses to trust Him, I am incapable of even seeing the edges of His amazing plans.

*He was trembling with fear, but his little face was set and grim. Already he was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket handkerchief from Bag-End long ago.* The Hobbit

June