

Update 11, written February 29, 2012

Maxim: Sergi (an evangelist) asked, "Tell me about that day." "It was my birthday." Max said, "I went out to the river with my friends. Yeah we had been drinking but we weren't blasted. Everyone jumped in and was fine. I was the last. I came to in the hospital. For awhile I figured they would just do what they needed to do then I would go home. After a month I realized that I was never going to walk again." On January 27th a friend and I took the train to Harcove (13 hrs north) where Max and his mom Maria lived. In the last update I shared how I had met them last June at the Christian evangelistic camp for the physically challenged. I had prayed for a quality wheel chair cushion and God had provided through ROHO. We were on our way to deliver it.

As I knew he would, Sergi gently, respectfully and purposefully guided the conversation. Within a very short time Maria shared that her mother (who practiced black magic) had loved Maria's oldest boy (12 years older than Max) and resented the second on the way. While still in the womb, Max's grandmother had cursed him. There were many more questions and a lot more said. Then Maria and Max listened thoughtfully and respectfully to the Gospel message and how the curse could be broken in a relationship with Christ. I would like to tell you that during our visit Maxim asked God to be Lord of His life but he did not. "When I make that decision I want to do it with a sincere heart. I can't do that today." We appreciated his honesty and said that that is the only way it should be done.

On our way back to the house we talked about the afternoon and Sergi and I had identical feelings. First, we had been obedient to what God had asked of us and there was joy in that. Second, that we had gotten the privilege being a step pad in God's calling of / working in the lives of Maxim and Maria. Thank you for your prayers!

Winter: 30 minutes after I arrived home Sunday the 29th it started snowing and within a half hour it was coming down pretty thick. I was clueless about the intensity of the storm that was headed our way. I just knew I was home and my heart was so thankful to God for safe travel. The couple we stayed with, the friend I traveled with and me included had all commented during the weekend, '...should have come for longer.' It was only when we arrived home and the weather hit that it became clear to us why God had prompted me to go when I did and for only as many days as I did. Oh what blessings are ours when we are obedient!

By night fall we had 4 inches and by Thursday we had a foot. For the next 3 weeks we (my area) would get more light snow fall and the temps would range from 33F to -1F. Depending on the day it was ice tray or snow cone terrain. I've only been here 14 years so what do I know about history? So it was interesting to eavesdrop in on conversations and understand that we were having some record breaking weather. Thanks to my YakTraks, I was mobile and it wasn't difficult to get out to clinic & do home visits. Dressed in all my layers though, I felt more like a barrel carrying Saint Bernard than Florence Nightingale. Please understand, I am explaining, NOT complaining! Drive 30 min in any direction and they had it much worse. Once again, I thanked God for putting me right where I am. He knew I was too wimpy for wilder weather!

Our temps are now in the low 40's and the snow piles are gone. The familiar mud has returned but I have to say it is nice to be able to reach for a lighter jacket and that the warm air feels good on your face. I'm thinkin' Spring will get here before August :)

Studies: Not to diminish the suffering around me...and many did...I was very grateful for answered prayer as that 'apartment in Greenland' came to me. With the bitter weather everyone's activities came to a halt and hours of study time opened up. Except for Sunday's and clinic days, I've been putting in 5 hours of studying each day. It has been a long while since I've sat so much for so long but I can't say that I've begrudged the time. Yuraslav & Valantina's pressure ulcers; Sveta's dad's frostbite; Tanya & Alexi's wounds complicated by AIDs; Yasha & Sasha's diabetic feet; Valentina & Zoya's osteomyelitis; Olga, Oxanna, Larrisa, Sergi & Sasha's venous stasis ulcers; Vassia's post-radiation treatment/malignant wounds/incontinence skin; Olga's malignant wound, Peter & Evon's arterial wounds; Zinna's strictured ascending stoma and 2 others with broken arms....my brain brought my caseload into the text books and we're the better for it. The tests are less than a month off and there is more to cover. But, I'm leaps and bounds ahead of where I was. Thanks for your prayers!

Hitting the books wasn't the only thing I did this past month. I had water, heat, electricity and even internet the entire time. In keeping with my winter tradition, I made 4 batches of cinnamon rolls. They make for a cozy apartment and are fun to give away. I cruised through a few more books for pleasure and curled up on the couch to take in a couple videos. And, I wasn't the only one who was blessed by the side effect of nasty weather. Many of my friends got some much needed rest and family time.

A difficult privilege: In medical terms you could describe her as an 80 + year old asthmatic with cardiac problems who was on steroids for 30 years and now had Herpes Zoster. In social terms you could describe her as a wife, mother of 2 and a past stout supporter of the Communist Party. In faith terms, Maria asked God to be Lord of her life 16 years ago after she saw God's

hand keep her through a serious surgery. Despite being the only believer in her family, God grew her faith deep. Who she was and who she had become was something the whole village knew about. Pastor Misha said that when she could still get about, she would use any excuse to gather people in her house to give them tea and share about Christ. I smiled when he said that because if I chose a picture for Maria it would be a china tea cup with pink flowers - real, delicate, smiling pink cheeks and ready to serve.

Over the years I saw Maria at the Premorski Church clinic – usually because a bump had torn her paper thin skin. She first made her way into my updates back in Dec. 2009 when she begged me to come to her home to check some sores on her face. My ‘not really an update...rather an alter’ update that month reflected the pressure I felt in taking care of her facial shingles. Her serious case was for a physician not for the likes of me. Then, this past August I received another call. She had some big sores on her leg, would I come?

Again with the situation completely out of my comfort zone and beyond my area of practice I tried to get out of it, pleading with them to find a doctor. I wrestled with God on this one. Yet I was ‘pinned’ when I grasped that she truly didn’t have a lot of options and she & God were asking me to help. During the next 7 months, more than I have for any other patient, I would spend hours pouring through books and asking God to help me help Maria. When I made a mistake, I would admit it and we would continue on. But, her Herpes Zoster wounds with secondary infection complications did not get better.

When I went to see Maria on the 7th, her daughter Maya stepped out of the room and I asked a question I knew I needed to. “Are you ready?” Maria knew what I meant. She smiled from her pillows and with confidence that true faith gives answered, “Yes I am ready.” “I only ask God one last thing. That He let me go to sleep and not wake up.” God answered His daughter’s last earthly request. Maria went to sleep the next Monday and died 2 days later.

There is a ton I could say – about how she was a little lighthouse in her family, village and church; about how the funeral drew 4 churches and many nonbelievers together and how happy she would have been to see that even in her death she shared about Christ; about how Pastor Sergi Voloshin did a wonderful job in guiding the service; how that sun came out and the spitting snowflakes sparkled – a surreal contrast to the bitter temps, tears and thud of mud on the casket. But, I’m not done processing all those things yet. I just know this – I had done my best; it had been intensely difficult; and, what humbling privilege to have been used as instrument of God to serve my sister in Christ and her family.

Everything before the Cross points forward to it.

Everything since the Cross points back to it.

Everything that will last was purchased on it.

Everything that matters hinges on it.

Randy Alcorn

Birthday: Kinda like a looong hug, I got a lot of loving on last week. Emails and electronic cards, cards in the mail, text messages & phone calls from friends here. 3 bundles of roses and an orchid plant were among my many gifts. If all the wishes of 'good health and a long life' come true, I will live until I'm 500 and never even have the sniffles! Joking aside, I didn't just show up last Saturday. Over the years they've seen me in all my realness and love me anyway. The Bible is true – Love covers a multitude of sins.

Visa: Thank you for your prayers! We have continued to move forward in completing the needed steps for my visa. My last thing to do is to go in tomorrow and have tests done to prove I don't have TB or AIDS. With Ukraine having one of the highest rates of increase of HIV/AIDs cases in Eastern Europe and ranking 5th in countries with the highest Tuberculosis burdern - it is a reasonable requirement. One of the pastors I work with is finalizing up the other papers and then that wraps it up for now. We've done all we could do until I return. That '...dark formidable mountain with its jagged heights...' I wrote about in the last update is still there. But, I'm not anxious anymore. It is gonna take a miracle to get this visa. If God wants me to have it, He will do that miracle. If He doesn't want it to happen, then I don't want it either.

Oregon: While it is still a couple weeks off, I wanted to let you know that I will be returning stateside on March 14th to apply for my visa and sit for my two nursing exams. I am excited, nervous and, if I'm honest, groaning inside. Excited because I am very much looking forward to seeing family & friends, getting a chance to simply unplug for a few days and when I return to Ukraine, my mom will be coming with me. Nervous - Am I ready for the exams? I have one chance to get it right – will I? And, groaning inside about the jet lag at both ends of the trip and the stress that comes with compressed time. I expect the final weeks here being hectic and the month there to be crazy, so most likely it will be late April before you hear from me again.

Wow invitation: As my stateside time will be limited I will be sharing at only one event. On Tuesday March 20th at 6:30 pm at Stillwater Retirement home in Lebanon, OR I will be sharing at a Woman of the Word (WOW) gathering. They have graciously given me permission to invite any ladies who follow the ministry God has given me to join us that evening. The address is 1811 S. 2nd Street and the meeting room is upstairs but there is an elevator. If you are able, please bring a small dish of finger food. June