

Update 12 ó written May 11, 2012

[heads up: It's a long one!]

In my last update in February, I said that it would be late April before I wrote again! .oops! missed that by a mile! As usual, we hit the ground running but let me backup 2 months and bring you up to speed.

Oregon: My trip back to the states went very well. The flights home were easy and the empty seats beside me made me feel like a princess in her royal carriage as I made my ½ way around the world trip. The first week was spent doing doctor and dentist appointments, attending a 1 day conference, speaking at a women's church gathering, getting my visa application sent off and moving through jet lag.

The 2nd week was focused on final review for and taking the wound and ostomy certification exams. I'm pleased to say that I received strong ~~B~~ on both tests. I was happy with my grades and glad to have that task complete for another 5 years.

The final 2 weeks were spent with my family. With my stateside time strategically planned over their spring breaks, I was able to spend at least several days with both my brother and sister and their families. This was time I had looked forward to for a bunch of months and it was very fun!

You aren't wealthy until you have something money can't buy.
Garth Brooks

Due to a mistake I made with the visa application, the return of my passport was delayed. So as not to have to pay for changes of airline tickets for both of us, Mom went on ahead as planned. I was grateful to God for the arrival of my passport the following day and flew off the next morning. God bless all my friends who went out of their way to make sure mom was taken care of until I arrived in Feodosia 36 hours after she had.

Since getting back, I haven't spent much time at the desk but mom has been good about keeping a journal. Below is what she's written in the past 5 weeks and I thought you would enjoy seeing our experiences through her eyes.

Mom's notes! ..

My travel to Ukraine alone went very well. The part I was most concerned about was the Ukraine custom officials. It turned out to be totally unlike any previous entries. There was no declaration form passed out on the flight. There was a form at the terminal for non-residents so I filled it out but no one asked for it. There were signs in English. There was a small x-ray for luggage but only a few bags went thru it and no bags were opened for inspection. It was so easy! I had a 6 hour layover & the weather was warm so I stayed outdoors as long as I could. June had given me her Ukraine cell phone for a backup. Three English speaking folks called me within an

hour after I had landed to confirm I was okay. One of these was Cory, calling from his plane there at the airport just before it took off. He was returning to the states.

Dr. Ludmilla & her husband met me in Simferopol for the final 2 hour ride to Feodosia. With very little sleep for the past 36 hours, I was nodding off & content that we could not hold a conversation. Friends had brought milk, bread & eggs to June's apartment so I was very happy to be left alone to rest until June arrived late the following day.

June had a neat opportunity while she waited the 6 hours in Kiev for her connection. She had in her suitcase some specific catheters she was bringing back for a paralyzed man. She wanted to get them to him as soon as she could but he lives 4 hours away so she wasn't sure how she was going to do that. A group of Americans (always easy to recognize Americans in this terminal) were also waiting for their connecting flight. They had come on a short term mission trip and would be working with the very church June's patient attended! She received a call the next day from Vladimir saying thanks so much for the catheters! Both marveled at God's ways!

Bucket & baby wipe days ó June started being told by phone & conversation that the water would be off; some told her a week before, others a few hours before shut off. While visiting with Pastor Misha Sunday evening he said he did not know about the water shut off. I told him he needed to hang around with the women after church service to get all the news. Turns out the bi-annual city water cleaning was going to happen and that meant the water would be shut off for three days. June has many friends looking out for her. Bless them.

Three days without water! My first thought was "Let's leave town!" Not an option, the VISA process is still the priority. So my next thought was to get all the "water jobs" done before midnight Monday. All this to say, I spent Monday doing some water jobs that June was asking help with: wash down kitchen & bathroom walls, ceilings, vents and pipes that are too high for her to reach. That was a long day. The next morning I lay in bed semi-awake for some time trying to get my tired arms & legs to connect. It was as if they didn't want to repeat yesterday's activity. So why did I do ALL that in one day? Hey, we have been booked & will continue to be "booking" in the weeks ahead! Let me tell you about it: but first of all, the VISA.

Visa: June described it as a 3 step process. Step 1 was from December through March as she found out what was going to be needed and began doing all she could ahead of time. Step 2 was her return to Oregon to apply for a visa (permission to stay in Ukraine longer than 90 days). Returning to Ukraine with her visa in hand, she proceeded to Step 3. This step is the gathering of the final documents needed to obtain the newly required Temporary Resident Permit. This process must be completed within 45 days of arrival back in country and thus far it has been a walk with God!

Working on the visa has meant June & Nicholi going off many mornings to specific offices to find a specific person to accept their specific document/ sign it /stamp it. Then the exercise repeats itself for another specific requirement. So far things have gone smoothly and better than expected (Thanks for your prayer support)! Nicholi & God are quite a team; it is awesome to see how they work together! Nicholi is gifted in so many ways; patient, discerning, experienced,

courteous. Without this team work the process would be confusing & exhausting. June has worked to prepare for this final step since last December so with most of her leg work done, simply being present for the officials to ask her questions is all that has been required.

After each trip out June returns with amazing details of how God opened the path for them. Example: on Tuesday, (April 17th) the second day after Easter, the sign on the office door that they needed to go to first said, ~~NO RECEPTION~~ It was locked up tight. An official for the KGB passed by them in the hall so Nicholi asked about the closure. The man was in a foul mood & offered no help. As Nicholi & June were getting into their car to leave a woman coming to work greeted Nicholi by name & asked what he was doing? Then she said, "Come with me" and they all went back into the building. She went through the ~~NO RECEPTION~~ door & Nicholi caught sight of a large number of workers eating, drinking & having a good time. The woman that Nicholi needed to see came out & happily processed the document. In the car later June asked, "Who was that lady that greeted & helped us?" Nicholi didn't remember her name; he could only remember that he did her a favor some time ago.

Now, ten days after returning to Ukraine they have completed everything they have been told to do. With the documents now in the officials' hands, they wait for the final confirmation. It could come as soon as next week but maybe not for three weeks. We've entered into May and there are a number of government holidays. Holidays often have pre & post days which extend official business closure but fortunately she has until May 25 before the 45 days expire.

EASTER June had just arrived in Feodosia the day before and both of us were weary from travel & time change. Sunday morning we both woke up at 4 a.m. (jet lag), dinked around till 7:30 when a nap was unavoidable---oops, a little late for the 10 o'clock service. We had already decided to attend service at Serge & Inna's church. because it is very close by, it was rainy & there is not a crowd of people to greet.

Later that day we enjoyed a very tasty meal at Nicholi's. It was good to be with the family again for a few hours of relaxed conversation & time to catch up with one another's lives. Nadia served Birch Juice for our drink with the meal. Yes, the birch tree! The tree is tapped similar to the maple tree for syrup flavoring. It was not too sweet, a simple flavor, good enough for refills! The trees do not grow down in this area but up wherever her brother lives they have them. Google this! I did just to challenge Google's knowledge, it is all there!

The following Sunday is Resurrection Sunday. As we rode the bus out to the Premorski church I was impressed to see so many folks carrying fresh & fake flowers, especially so many men. How sweet. June later told me they are on their way to the cemetery to remember their deceased family & friends. For some it turns into a very merry time for picnics & drinking. Some will leave food at the grave for the deceased. I am sure the birds like this custom.

I smile as we pass the old cemeteries where each family plot is squared off by a little painted iron fence. It expresses to me our need for gating & walling our space - dead or alive - we are closing in & closing out something.

Our first week here we completed the sorting & packing of 40 Vacation Bible School (VBS) boxes. Fortunately we were able to use a room in the basement of the EFES center & Nicholi had already moved all the boxes of supplies from the storage garage to this room. I worked alone a couple afternoons while June & Nicholi went around town doing VISA business. Then Friday & Saturday we put in some long hours to get the job completed by Saturday evening. We were very pleased it was done but too tired to dance! I looked forward to the next day being Sunday, a day of rest.

On Sunday morning, still in need of more rest I was a bit mucked as I anticipated the usual struggle with the required wedding veil for church. It always slides off & getting it back in place without getting all my hair in my face annoys me. Fortunately, since previous visits the style has acceptably been reduced! The thinner strip of scarf tied tightly in back stayed in place all thru the service!!

EFAS Center - Tuesday- April 24 we woke to fully blue sky with no cold wind to chill us, it was so welcome! Wednesday was even warmer. At last for the first time since arriving we could take our jackets off! Up until then the thought of going to walk on the beach was too windy cold to be inviting. However, a walk to the beach didn't happen because we had a big favor to repay.

As a way of saying thank you for the use of the basement to do VBS boxes and also as a way to help them get ready for summer season, we offered to make lunch for the EFAS Center work crew today. Heading out early to market we purchased the needed food. Then, June's taxi driver came to help us get all the food out to the center with a detour first to deliver cushion & foam to a paralyzed boy (diving accident) that we had just visited a few days earlier. After that we arrived at the center in time to get stroganoff & carrot salad ready to serve for the one o'clock meal.

After clean up June & I worked outdoors sweeping the entire tile walk way & spraying the weeds in the tile cracks. Because the hand pump sprayer is broken, spraying took on a new style with a short handled Ukraine broom & a bucket of weed killer solution I dipped the broom in the bucket then dabbed & brushed it on the weeds. Though the back was nagging it was effective & it all got done!

Christian Conference for Medical Students - One of our original plans was changed for several reasons. There is a three day Christian medical conference next week. For us it would be a 15 hour 1 way overnight train ride into new territory (central Ukraine). Through her ministry, June is helping to sponsor this conference so she really wanted to attend to evaluate it for the future. However, this was going to take a total of 5 days. Combine that with poor sleep on the train both ways & several other factors - in short we didn't go.

Tanya F. - One day we stopped by Tanya's to say hi. She had prepared a treat for our visit. She likes to try new things & surprises - and serve them to June. Tanya was telling us how her hair began to fall out in alarming amounts. She shared this with another woman who suggested she use a product that contained burdock. It helped to stop the fall out. So what is burdock? She said it is a plant that has burrs and a purple head. A GOOGLE challenge again - and there it is! The irony of the discovery is that all 40 years on the farm we have been destroying a cash crop! This bull thistle that we have a lot of has an edible root, is a good source of iron & insulin comes in form of pill & ointment - go look & see there is more info. Now GOOGLE has changed the traveling experience. Instead of shaking your head in confusion of what you are being told & what you know just GOOGLE & the connection happens! How fun!

Rest - An all blue sky again, how exciting! And this day, Thursday - April 26 we declared restoration day. We just finished washing our hair by dumping warm water on one another's head while kneeling by the shower (kitchen sink is full of soaking dirty dishes & bathroom sink only big enough to spit in). There is much to do today but hopefully we can do it & not get exhausted. This is our third day without water. Looking forward to a shower tomorrow!

On the 27th we had a full day outing with Pastor Misha as our chauffeur. We drive up to visit church planter Bogdan and his wife. It has been several years since June has seen them and she also wanted to deliver their VBS supplies. I understood it is a 6 hour round trip drive but I was looking forward to seeing new country & the pleasure of being out of the city. So glad we got those VBS boxes completed a week ago. Already more than 20 have been transported to their various locations! So for the time being, we have moved from jobs to journeys.

Narnia - We just returned from a weekend on the coast in Sudak. It was a fun & relaxed time. We were ready for some rest as the days have been very full since we arrived in Ukraine. On Saturday the 28th, we took the bus for the 1 ½ hr trip to Sudak. We saw friends I had made during my last trip to Ukraine; attended church with them on Sunday and that evening went with

them to another village up the coast where the youth group presented NARNIA, puppet style. Wow they did a great job & showed such creativity with the setting! After the performance we opened our suitcase & served them caramel corn. The folks in Sudak like Nebraska pop corn!

On Monday, we joined the Sudak church on their picnic outing. It was a warm day but they had the picnic in the shade of the rows of planted pine trees. It was a simple event but all ages enjoyed themselves. We were glad to be a part of it. Afterwards one of the church members drove us home and returned to Sudak with the VBS boxes we had ready for them.

Translators: My interpreter (June) doesn't always get the full picture sometimes & doesn't press for all the details so this visit in Sudak had both of us often hanging loose watching so see what really was going to happen, the order it was going to happen, who was going to make it happen, why it was happening and when we were to be ready. Nothing like the fog of confusion to keep our attention!

I had gotten use to only June speaking in English to me. But, when June is busy talking with others I am left out of the conversation and begin to feel like a big spot out of place. I feel like one of those shepherds I see out in the field with only the livestock for "company." All that to say, it was great to have Masha's (Pastor Misha's 20 year old daughter) translation help! Happy for the chance to brush up on her English, Masha went with us on several village trips. Besides my feeling more included, she was just fun to have along.

Sweet stuff! We took pecan pies out to the clinic on Tuesday to say ðhiö & celebrate clinic nurse Tanya's birthday. Here it is considered bad luck to wish someone happy birthday before the day. Fortunately, she does not claim that superstition & totally enjoyed the crust (ðIt melts in your mouth! I have to have this recipe!ö), mysterious pecans & the jelly filling. She went home happy with her gift of leftover pie! Then there was a peach pie that went to Nicholi's family & the pumpkin pie for the EFAS center when we were packing boxesí . So far in 5 weeks 10 pies, 3 cakes, 2 garbage bags full of caramel corn, 3 batches of chocolate chip cookies and 24 muffins have walked out the door.

CHANGES: My first visit to Ukraine was twelve years ago. This is my fourth visit & on each return there have been visible changes in both prosperity & individuality.

*Many of the traditional one story walled in bungalows have raised their roof for a second story!

*Many of the 4 - 6 story concrete apartment buildings exteriors are sporting bright color combinations of blue, yellow, green & peach. They bring a cheerful outlook to city life.

*Some homes are looking sharp with vinyl siding over the concrete blocks & roofs in rich colors of red, green or blue.

*New two story homes with steep roof design, vinyl window styles & probable open beam ceilings are reflecting a desire for more openness, natural light and a break from traditional design.

*In some areas of prosperity the traditional little gated bungalow are looking as if they are being choked while those around them are going upward for space & light.

*Twelve years ago very few people had a phone in their home not to mention a computer. Half a day could be spent going (walk or by bus as few had cars) to someone's home with a message or item, only to find no one at home. Now cell phones are everywhere. What a help!! The cell phone has also brought a relaxed mood to the streets. Without them the silent somber street walk could be depressing to me.

*The green field we use to walk thru on the way to Nicholi's apartment building no longer exists. Twelve years ago it had unattended weeds, grass & trash with walking paths cutting thru it. Then scattered around the edges came a few portable kiosks for bread & fruit & used items. Now the entire field is full of concrete one & two story businesses with a broad walkway the full length of that former field on the outskirts of town.

*I think there are fewer manholes without covers for one to fall into. Some that are open have bunches of branches sticking out of them to warn of possible danger. I appreciate that thoughtfulness!

*A nice change - a new law that says vehicles must yield to pedestrians or be fined! The drivers no longer come at you like you are chickens on the road to be scattered & they have no brakes. Thank you!

*The LADA still has much to work on for a comfortable automobile ride but speed & rough roads contribute to travel fatigue. Seat belts are also a law but they are seldom available...presenting one more opportunity to call on God.

*Fine European cars are everywhere - Nissan, Audi, BMW and Volkswagens.

*The goats still run free to graze in the villages & the cows are shepherded or tethered, keeping the road sides trimmed. The sickles still cut the greens to be carried home for the confined livestock but in the city a power lawn mower & an occasional weed eater can now be spotted.

Patients We went to Yuraslav's home, an eighteen year old boy paralyzed from the shoulders down. His folks are taking good care of him in a well kept home. As I watch June treat his multiple pressure wounds that developed in the hospital it is interesting for me to recognize the wound dressing, tape & gauze, ointments, gloves, wheel chair cushion, sheep skin, braces. All these medical supplies he had to aid him to heal & be more mobile had come thru the Humanitarian Aid boxes from the states. That includes so many folks that remembered & cared enough to gather & send so I could pack them for shipping with funds you have donated, then three months safely on the ship & thru customs to be picked up by van in a city two hours from here...now here they are in his room giving him hope & comfort.

So many grateful patients! Masha was translating for me on clinic day. We saw some very needy individuals. She was challenged with the multiple conversations all wanting to say thank YOU for the help they are receiving thru the clinic. In some countries this is the best it gets. Thank you America for your giving heart!

One Last road trip: Every time I good out June's door I know an new experience or discovery awaits me. We have taken a good number of one day road trips to villages by bus or car. Though travel is fatiguing each trip has been a good experience. We have delivered VBS supplies & funds, medical supplies for patients, we have seen their gardens & gotten acquainted with the family. We have walked in the woods & climbed rocky country side, explored old-old ruins, been fed delicious borsch, tea & sweets & full meals prepared by cheerful cooks in a tiny kitchen the size of a walk-in closet.

Saturday 6May 12- we will travel north five hours to the Berdansk clinic by van with 35 boxes of medical & VBS supplies. After four days working with them we will then travel two more hours north with remaining supplies to the clinic in Zaparoshja. It sounds like she will be seeing patients there as well. We plan to be there for three days & return to Feodosia by train the following Saturday. While I've been sending them medical supplies for several years now, this will be the first chance I've gotten to meet them. After 1 day at June's apartment we will pack up again and fly to Kiev on the 21st. We'll spend a day seeing some sights there and then I'll return to Oregon. My time here has been fun & full. I am glad I came! Marilyn