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But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.; (Gal 3:23-29)

APRIL 2022
DEAR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS OF
THE REACH BEYOND
MINISTRY TO THE PEOPLES
OF CZECHIA AND SLOVAKIA

DEAR GOD'S SERVANTS

In our last Electronic Prayer Letter, we wrote: *"This is probably one of the most emotionally difficult reports to write about our ministry. Not long ago daily numbers*



of infected, hospitalized and deceased from Covid preoccupied our minds. On February 24th we awoke to a state of war between Ukraine and Russia. As we are following recent events from different sources it is hard to concentrate on anything else."

The humanitarian, economical, and ecological catastrophe, regardless of who provoked what is happening in Ukraine, does not change the fact that there is no bright future in the days ahead. The atmosphere in which we live is tragically oppressive, but not hopeless.

KLARA'S LIFE STORY

I have been asked many times by friends here and there to write the story of my life, but the opportunity has not come until now.

This is the testimony of a little girl from Ukraine who, years later, became my mother.

My grandmother, Tatyana, was born in Ukraine in 1900. I don't know too many details about her youth. As a childless widow, she married a veteran of WWI. He served in the Russian army, and during that time he became a POW in Germany where he learned a lot about taking care of horses.

Out of this marriage, four children were born. My mother, Maria, was the oldest. She was born in December of 1923. She was 9 years old when the famine in Ukraine began. Between 3 to 6 million people starved to death. My mother's family survived only because her father, at the time a folk vet, knew about a frozen flesh of a dead horse in the ground.

My mother's account, from a child's perspective and experience, cause chills to run down the spine to this day for anyone who hears about it. As a youngster, she saw a neighbor's hungry, crying toddler that the dead mother could not feed. She shared with us the cases of cannibalism and other horror stories.

The famine was not the result of war or some natural disaster. Ukrainian peasants rejected Stalin's collectivization of their farms. In the autumn of 1932, the Russian commissars even climbed up on the roof and pulled hidden ears of corn out of the thatch. In addition, the Stalin era of industrialization in the USSR introduced compulsory levies on agricultural production and a tax on food-producing trees, and the drive for collectivization eventually led to the genocide of the Ukrainian people. The fact that Ukrainians subsequently felt no sympathy for Russians became apparent the moment WWII began. The first troops of the German army arriving in Ukraine were welcomed as liberators from Stalinist communism. We know from authentic testimonies that Ukrainian villages welcomed them at first as liberators from Russian oppression. Who were these soldiers? Men from the annexed territories of what was then Czechoslovakia and Poland. They were sent to the front lines. They prepared a feast from local resources. For this first welcoming, Ukrainians are now often con-

sidered "fascist." The hope of liberation faded quickly. Behind the German army came the SS. A war of hell and fury had begun.

In 1941 the SS came to the village of Romanky where my mother's family lived. The villagers were gathered in the school hall where they were shown a propaganda film about the victoriously advancing German troops and how welcomed they are in Ukraine.

Then all the residents were sent home, but unmarried and childless young women were detained. By this time, the men were already at the front. My mother was among those detained. The parents were told to prepare food for the next two weeks and that their girls would go to Germany to work. Before my mother left, her father (POW of WWI) told her, *"You don't have to be afraid of the Germans; they appreciate hard work."*

After two weeks, the transport of cattle cars arrived at Dachau, Germany. This was a concentration camp where the recently arrived workforce was distributed to workplaces throughout Germany. Since no one had any documents, my mother made herself one year younger. This way she became a minor. Instead of being sent to work in the factory, she ended up in Garmisch-Partenkirchen as the kitchen helper. For the first time in her life, she ate a hearty meal, got clothes, the first shoes owned by her, and had a bed and room to live in. At her place, not one shot was fired. There she met a Czech man who had been working in Germany since 1936. He later became my father.

The end of the war was approaching and my mother was pregnant. Her childless German employer told my parents-to-be, *"Don't worry, whatever the outcome of*

the war will be, we will take care of the child." This is the reason I was named Klara, the name of the lady where my mother found shelter and safety.

The first thing the Russians did after the victory over Germany was to round up all Soviet citizens, all POWs, and those who had survived and worked in Germany. They put them behind barbed wire to deport them back to Russia. I don't know the exact details, but my father bribed a Russian officer, and he released my pregnant mother so she could give birth to me. This event saved my mother's life, as well as mine.

Only later did we learn that those who survived the war in Germany were considered traitors. To be a POW was treason. Every Soviet soldier must fight to the death. Instead of returning home, they were transported to Siberia to gulags and labor camps.

I was born in Czechoslovakia, delivered at home by a German midwife whose name I still remember. My parents settled in a small border town next to Germany. This was the only choice they had after they came to Czechoslovakia. For centuries the Sudetenland was inhabited by German-speaking communities. The first act of Hitler's war adventure was the annexation of this territory (Munich Agreement). The Czech territory became the „Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia." After the end of the war, about three million ethnic Germans were expelled or fled. They left behind vacant houses. Within a few months, the area became populated with all kinds of post-war displaced people and minorities.

Post-war Europe was divided into East and West and the area became controlled by a border military presence known as an

iron curtain. This division lasted for the next 45 years.

By God's hand, my mother and I have been protected in this barbed-wire territory. Because Soviet citizens were not allowed to marry foreigners, my parents were able to get married after Stalin died in 1953. During these 8 years, my father had been going to the Soviet embassy quarterly to renew my mother's permission to stay in Czechoslovakia. All this time we lived in fear that both of us would be deported to the USSR.

My mother and I visited her Ukrainian home for the first time after 17 years in 1958. I will never forget the tears of crying mothers from Romanky, and nearby villages, and also the streams of vodka drunk by men, often invalids who came to see the only one of the girls who was taken 17 years ago to Germany. Their daughters had disappeared in Siberia.

And then came August 1968. The Prague Spring was crushed by *"fraternal help to Czechoslovakia"*. The scenario of Russian betrayal is engraved in our minds forever. Half a million soldiers with some soldiers from Soviet satellites invaded Czechoslovakia. Then the Soviet leaders kidnapped the Czechoslovak government of the time to Moscow for "negotiations." There they were "convinced" that a counter-revolution was taking place in Czechoslovakia. A few weeks later, "normalization" began. Our country became once again a Russian gubernia for the next 20 years.

Emigration was the beginning of our new life. We became refugees. Our only possessions at that time were two small children, and a backpack full of washable diapers. Our only desire was not to remain with the Soviet Union for eternity (the slo-

gan of the time was *"With the Soviet Union forever"*). In January 1970 America embraced us with open arms in Northern ID, where most of the people met for the first time in their lives refugees from a communist country.

Not only did we find the security of a new home in America, but God had far more unexpected plans for our lives.

We left Czechoslovakia as unbelievers, but He gave us a family, preparing us to return to our homeland after the fall of communism as missionaries. It was a scenario none of us could imagine or dreamed up.

Now, 54 years later, our experience is repeated in Ukraine. Unlike the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia, the country was not militarily destroyed. Human casualties were a few hundred compared to tens of thousands in Ukraine. But there were traitors, opportunists, convinced communists who, with the Russian government, "normalized" the country.

Perhaps normalization did more damage to the hearts of the population than Russian tanks.

PRAISE AND PRAYERS

- Please pray for Czech and Slovak countries, Poland, Belorussia, Baltic countries, and European Union. We all are in great danger since we all are energy-dependent on Russia. In other words, the war is financed by energy sources we all desperately need.
- The whole world will feel the impact of this global event. Let us pray that this situation will bring many of God's chosen people to Christ

- Time to fervently pray for leaders of involved governments and people who are seeking safety.

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:28-31)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS,
SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION
IN OUR LIFE AND
THE CZECH & SLOVAK
MINISTRIES**

**In His Sovereign Grace,
Pavel and Klara Steiger
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