

Faith on Wheels

Introduction

It was back in 1973. The political and economic situation in El Salvador was not very promising. There were many disagreements, manifestations of unhappiness against the government and its systems, kidnaps, abuse, and rumours of war.

There was great instability in the National University where I attended; more than in any other place.

However, the political and social problems never affected me, personally. It was my interior that I was worried about. I was 22 years old and I didn't want to follow the crowd; I didn't want to be part of the generation I lived in and its ideas. I understood that the world I lived in was unjust but I also understood that I could not fight the unjust with injustice. There is no way out when going against hate.

I think I felt like "Ishmael" from the literary work Moby Dick; a character that couldn't find anything attractive on earth so he decided to board an adventure. In that same way, I was lucky enough to be able to join a cruise called "Sun Viking" of the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line. It was not a whale hunting job; it was more about a job where bored passengers felt better by living in a better atmosphere. However life turned out to be even more monotonous. In reality, it seemed to me that life was leading no where, and it had no meaning for me, where the only purpose was only to work in order to keep existing.

The worst of all was that these cruises did not go to places that I wanted to visit, like Europe for example. I had seen so many pictures of that continent and I felt a strong attraction to its history, scenery, its people, and its culture. Finally, in October 1973 my dream to visit Europe came true. I flew to Luxemburg with two of my friends and...there we were; yes, there we were in a new and unknown world. It was of course, the beginning of a new adventure. I had no money to go back home in case the situation did not go as we planned; however, that was the whole deal of the adventure where I put "the limits".

What was the objective of all this? Back then, I was not able to express it. It takes time for our feelings and thoughts to find its texture. Now I understand that what I really wanted to do was to test myself and who I was as an individual without that foundation of protection and love that I received from my parents.

What was my identity? What kind of material was I made out of? Was I good or evil? Could I move on, on my own? What if my money finished? Above all, my main question: If God existed, Is He personal enough to help me?

After about month after our arrival; my friends and I attended an intensive course of Italian in Rome, three hours a day. I felt disappointed because I realized that the routine of life is always the same no matter where you are. This impacted me like never before.

Other than the fact that Italy's economy was better, people there did not seem to be much happier. I discovered that there was nothing to discover. However, there was almost an imperceptible aspect. While I was walking to school, someone came up to me and spoke to me about Jesus. I can barely remember the conversation. What I do remember saying is that I did not agree with the religion because of its inconsistency. I didn't understand why there were such riches in the Vatican and so much poverty around the world. Then I started a conversation with Mike who had been a drug addict. Doctors told Mike he was diagnosed with disablement. Then he told me how Jesus had healed him and changed his life. Afterwards, Mike introduced me to three Scandinavian sisters: Eija, Britt-Marie and Gunilla. I could see a light in their eyes that astonished me and convinced me that they had the Truth. I said to myself:

"I'd give up everything to have what they have"

Mike had told me that he was living in a Evangelical Church directed by Pastor Luciano Crociani and that they were getting ready to put up a tent where they were going to preach.

The first encounter with Mike had a great impact in my life but the two weeks went by and I had no clue what

had happened to the preachers, until I found a Christian track that someone left in a window of a university dining room. The track had the address of that church that they had mentioned and it made me realize they had come back.

I believe that the Holy Spirit was laying such a conviction of sin on me that the fact of facing those “Jesus Freaks” frightened me. I began to feel that Jesus wanted me to become one of His disciples.

Since I was 17 years old I’d always thought that if I would have had the opportunity to live in the times of Christ, I would have wanted to follow Him as one of his disciples because I saw that following him, life would always make sense. His love, His example, His miracles, His teachings...all of those things brought such a fascinating attraction to me. However, Jesus was just a character who lived 2000 years ago. Yes, I did believe that he had risen, but, all this...What for? If he had gone to heaven and left us in the same condition as we were before he came.

In reality, I think I had never seen an authentic example of anyone who lived exclusively for Him except two people: a friend from school in El Salvador and a sailor in the cruiser where I worked. They were both isolated cases which made me reflect only to a certain point but...this time, it was different, and it was a challenge. There were actually people who followed Jesus in the middle of the 20th century. They were people who had left everything to go out to the world and evangelize. People who lived by faith.

Every time I met with those people, it provoked me to feel even more conviction and fear. I was not in Europe to leave it all. It was not an honour to live in a camping tent in the middle of Rome.

Moreover, in the university atmosphere, the students were considering the American preachers as spies of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and suspected them for searching for fire-arms in “La casa dello Studente” or “The Students House” (as there actually were arms stored there). The brothers and sisters of the evangelistic team were humiliated, beat, and threatened as they would come close to the university. Of course, because of the reputation they had, I did not want to identify myself with them

I made friends with Italian communists who thought highly of me only because I was Latin-American. They thought I was like “Che Guevara”, their idol. They would never be able to accept that I would associate with the Christian youth of the tent. Actually, they invited me to travel with them to the mountains, where I would be able to see real snow. I had seen snow before at the “Popocatepel” Guatemala; however it was not fresh snow. The invitation was tempting; I had to think about it very good, after all, it would be a decision that would affect the rest of my life. Therefore, there was a great conflict in me.

I knew that if I gave my life to Christ, it would be for the rest of my life; something unconditional; and that if I put my hand on the plough and looked back, I would not be worthy of the Kingdom of God.

The Lord had mercy upon me because many times, it’s through hard circumstances and contradictions that we receive the light in order to understand and do his will.

So this is what happened: I asked for a sign and of course, asking for a sign can be something dangerous. One day, I found out that someone had stolen all my personal documents, my passport and all my money. In a way I understood it and only I could understand it, that it was the sign I asked for and it was about my identity. God was going to give me another identity. The Lord was going to adopt me in his family as a legitimate son. It was no longer “I” who lived but Christ who was going to live in me.

When it comes to my documents, I had to take legal action declaring everything I had lost. I was already registered in the El Salvador embassy in Rome---then, with a copy of the lawsuit I received a new passport. Nevertheless, days after I received my new passport, my old passport arrived via mail with all the other documents.

What had happened was that the thief or whoever found it had put all the documents in one of the many mail boxes in Rome. This is a habit of the gypsies, because if they get caught with strange documents, they would get arrested.

When the documents are thrown into the mailbox and they are not in an envelope, they eventually get to the respective embassies (if foreign) or to the fiscal address (if Italian).

I admired the “thief’s ethic” because when we lose any identity document, it takes a long time in different offices and lots of effort in order to get them back.

Going back a little, our true identity is invisible, its spirit and soul. This is what builds our true selves and while God does not adopt us as his children, we will have an identity crisis. Our biggest necessity consists in knowing that we have a loving Father and that His love towards us is unconditional. This emptiness can be satisfied only when we voluntarily ask Him to adopt us, and as it is done, understand that we must live to his pleasure.

Finishing my declarations, I decided to visit the Christian camp located in Via Cristoforo Colombo (Rome). There was a preacher named Bill Lowery, who with the authority of God was sharing a very powerful and anointed message. Not as a religious person, but as someone who has experimented the power of God in his own life.

The message consisted in the liberation of Israel from the Egyptian slavery. Since we can all relate to that story of being slaves of sin, he explained how only Jesus can set us free as it says in the New Testament in the word of God: “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31, 32)

That was the night I turned my life over to God, December 27, 1974.

Nine days after, I was accepted in the evangelistic group that back then, consisted of about 100 members. Almost all of them were young. There is where I met the one who is now my wife, Laila who 6 months earlier had joined the mission while the tent was in Sweden. That was when the Ministry “Christ is the Answer” put up the tent in Gothenburg, which was the first time they put it up in Europe.

By the grace of God, Laila and I are happily married. As the proverb says “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord”. We have 5 kids and several grandchildren and it’s been more than 30 years since my conversion.

I would have many books to write about victories and defeats, sadness and happiness. Certainly, it has been an abundant life, and I have been in many countries. I could not say exactly because I felt inclined to write about our experiences in Russia. Maybe because in the first ten years of being a disciple, I thought I knew everything and above all, how to obtain from God what I desired. Everything was black and white. Nevertheless, in the past years I began to understand that it is very little what I know because our God is an unpredictable God in the good sense of the word. However if we see it only from our subjective point of view we might feel that God is unfair.

The experience in Russia was very harsh, and I still cannot make definite conclusions. It’s a relief to know that the last chapter of the Russian evangelization is not yet written. However, I do believe it will be a victorious one because our God is an Invincible God even though sometimes it seems that we end up losing--but in reality, He is doing something to take us from victory to victory.

**Our defeats are His victories,
Because only this way we learn
to be humble.**

Dietrich Bonhoefer said, “A God who let us prove his existence would be an idol”.

Certainly, even if we walk close to Him for many years and have received many revelations from him, there will still be aspects of his person that will be hidden to us. I say this because I get angry when someone comes with an attitude of being superior trying to underestimate Gods ministries and suggesting putting aside everything that I have learned when they don't even know what they are talking about.

God is a personal God. He is personal with each of us. My wish is that with this book, God can speak to you something personal. After seeing my experience and the principals that I have discovered, I hope you can apply them in your life and maybe experience things you never imagined.

We shall see each other soon because the last chapter of the Russian evangelization is yet not written.

I would like to clarify that this book is not written with the intention of attacking our brothers nor to offend they're feelings. It's to raise the awareness of what a foreign missionary feels like when he wants to do something good for a country.

Part 1

Will the Lord find faith when returning to earth?

This is a question that the scriptures themselves don't have an answer. It's like when Jesus was asked about His return and He answered, "But the day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only" ([Matthew 24:36](#)).

We can do any type of studies and speculations, however, what God is interested over all is not to get to a point where we "discover" something related with the book of Daniel and Revelations (yet it being beneficial), but in the formation of our character and for it to be similar to the one in Christ. When this takes place, we will be ready to face Him and in the same way, rejoice at a level similar to His in His Kingdom.

This books objective is to thoroughly examine ourselves and find out if we are walking in faith, indeed, the character of the question should wake us up and question ourselves: What is faith?, Are we living in faith or not? Ultimately, "without faith, it is impossible to please God". ([Hebrews 11:6](#))

I Chapter 1. What is faith?

If we have attended bible school regularly, it would be very easy to answer this question remembering the verse in ([Hebrews 11:1](#)), which says: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"

But reading the passage is not enough, because this scripture limits to give us the information regarding faith, since the contents in this revelation only God can distribute. So, the true meaning of faith will be revealed once we have experienced in our own lives the power of God in a personal way.

The revelation can be obtained as a result of our obedience and depending only upon Him. Especially, when the circumstances are conflictive and nevertheless we determine in our hearts to unconditionally trust in Him. To think that reading this book will increase your faith automatically would be like trusting that you will learn a foreign language by only studying its grammar. Even though we know all the sentence structure rules and the conjunction of verbs, our real knowledge will not take place until we begin to communicate in that new language.

There are languages very hard to learn, but it does not stop surprising us to see kids speaking their native language in such a fluent way without attending a school in order to learn. Now, it is known that there is no actual school to learn and develop our faith. However, there are great men like: Abraham, Moses, and the apostle Paul that developed their faith throughout their lives by obeying the Lord.

I believe there is no formula or procedure to follow that will augment our faith. If it consisted in following instructions for example; repairing a motor, building a bridge or operating a tractor, the world would be filled

with men full of faith because their procedures are attractive and at the end of our efforts, we feel “satisfied” with ourselves because “we finished the puzzle”. However, the faith that the Bible talks about does not work that way.

Neither does faith consist in our reasoning, “leaving everything in God’s hands”. It is necessary to put our part into it by studying the Bible with all our hearts, since faith is obtained and augmented receiving it daily.

Without faith, we are totally unprotected against the opponent. In (Ephesians 6:16) the apostle Paul indicates very clearly that faith is a vital part of God’s armor, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked”.

For this reason, Jesus asked that when in prayer, his disciples never lacked faith. He knew it was the most important in order to resist any opponent and in order for evangelization to take place.

I Chapter 2. Materialism versus Faith

One of the strongest impressions I had in the city of Moscow was the young orthodox priests or nuns that were standing in the subway with a very severe look. These priests had a very long beard and money boxes in each of their hands where sometimes pedestrians placed a coin.

The funds gathered from that were for maintenance and/or construction of orthodox temples. Is this faith? Believe that God will provide money through those offerings in order to build those golden domes that only impress tourists and calendar pictures.

To be honest, I believe these young men and women are wasting their time and that these cathedrals are effectively a testimony like Carlos Marx said “Religion is the opium of the people”. I mean, not only in Russia but in Latin America, Europe, and USA there is also many types of sumptuous and empty cathedrals. I would say they are more like museums full of artwork that don’t necessarily glorify the Lord.

With all this, I can say that faith consists in trusting God in an unconditional way. Recognize that He is who creates circumstances and that everything He does in our lives is motivated by His great love towards us. Accept from Him any adversity and receive it with joy. This is a personal decision filled with feelings and emotions. Then, trust that in some way he will equip us spiritually in order to fulfil impossible missions for us in the natural, but possible to Him. Missions like when Abraham left Ur of Chaldea’s without knowing his final destiny; like Joseph that had patience in prison; like Moses that had the strength to bring his people out of Egyptian slavery; like Paul, to evangelize and minister in churches.

In that same way, we need faith to live lives that please God and to be live testimonies, reference points, conquer cities and nations for Christ.

Faith looks towards the invisible.

I Chapter 3. The Doubt

Things that make us doubt about faith.

The scriptures talk about some that failed in faith.

Back then, like today, there are teachers that think that faith means to obtain whatever we wish and certainly, this is something very attractive. It is easy to inspire someone with a desire. Such was the way that the serpent seduced Eve: “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall surely not die: For God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”.

These teachers say: Why have little when we can have so much? In contrast, Jesus became poor for us to be rich.

That is why only through the spirit of God we can get to know the truth. It is an extremely sad sensation when we feel like we didn't have enough faith to reach the promise. I know about Christians that go through fatal depression because of guilt complex and feel accused by their conscience for not having enough faith. Maybe you heard a preacher saying: that you must have faith to obtain a certain amount of money, for a job, for health---and since God didn't answer your prayers, you believe that you've been abandoned by God or didn't have enough faith.

It helped me a lot to read books by Joni Ericsson (USA). The extraordinary question after being anointed by the elderly and prayed for healing was: Did she have faith? I believe she did. But God in his sovereignty chose not to answer her prayer by manifesting healing. I believe it, because the life of Joni, after that, gives testimony that God is still being glorified through her and even using her handicap because only that way, she can understand and minister to those suffering similar difficulties.

Another very interesting thing that I read in book by Richard Wurmbrandt (Romanian) is that while he still was in prison he would pray the prayer of faith, based on the scriptures, if we tell a mountain to rise and throw itself into the ocean, if there is no doubt in our hearts, it will happen... then he ordered the prison wall--- move!---but it never did. He yelled again until the guards came up to him and asked what he was doing---, he answered---"I am telling the wall to move because I have faith that it will." However, the wall stayed in place and the guards obviously thought he was crazy.

Then he felt disappointed and thought: If this promise is not efficient, how am I supposed to know the rest of the promises are true?

He felt disappointed by God in that moment.

However, he never lost his faith. He understood many years afterwards that even if the prison walls never fell, however an even larger one did, and that is the iron curtain. It did because there were Christians all over the world praying, believing and having faith. This barrier fell over so powerfully like the walls of Jericho. "So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" ([Joshua 6:20](#)).

Sometimes God gives us faith for larger things rather than for smaller ones. *These are the things that precisely show us if our faith is authentic or not.*

In other words, it doesn't always depend on the immediate results that we wish to see. Not on adversity, let's not get discouraged, let's not lose hope, let's not lose desire to walk along with God and to get to know Him in a more profound way. Because it is no longer my will but His; and His will is always the best, because He is even higher and only He knows the final result.

Even though He being the Lord, He suffered like a human the conflict in the garden of Gethsemane. ([Luke 22:39-46](#)). It was such a profound conflict that He transpired drops of blood. The nervous tension got to a practically intolerable point and He prayed to the Father that if possible, this cup would pass from Him. In other words, the petition was if the Father had any other way with which it would be possible to rescue humanity. A decision was all that it needed in order to avoid such fathomless pain, human disregard, the loneliness on the cross, defeat, the abandonment of his disciples; the shame His mother would feel when she saw him hanging on that cross. To have mercy upon him, like human and to avoid the cruel death he was getting closer to each minute.

However the Father did not respond to His Sons petition. Was it that Jesus, as human, didn't have faith?"

His petition was not granted. Jesus accepted his Father's will, because it was the best, because there was no other alternative, because if so, prophecies would not have been fulfilled. It was like if in that moment, human fate depended on Jesus' determination as human. At that moment, He was weak. I believe there was a chance that He would have failed his mission since he left behind his power as God. He was a human, just like us, vulnerable, weak, under a huge attack, an even harder attack compared to when he fasted for 40 days

and 40 nights in the desert.

The greatest enemy was in his human nature that wanted to avoid pain, the suffering for others, however Jesus continued. I wonder if we would have been saved from hell---from the wrath of God. That is why God makes no compromise and neither does He lower his standards.

This is how we understand that God always has a higher objective than ours, much higher. Therefore, we must accept his will at any cost, even if it seems as if we didn't have faith or we even might get accused of having little faith.

As understood, in that great day, all men, big and small, even those who despised him: Ananías, Caifas, the roman soldiers who crucified him and lived after his crucifixion; those who persecuted Christians during the Roman Empire like Neron; atheists like Voltaire and Anatole Francé; the existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre; communist leaders like Trotsky, Lenin, Marx, Stalin, Breshnev; Muslim leaders like R.A. Komeini, Bin Laden, all these will bow on their knees because it will be a moment of revelation like a lightening. They will understand Gods purpose in their lives---they will understand Gods love, Christ's sacrifice, and realize their guilt. They will have no way to justify their acts, but it will be eternally too late and there won't be another opportunity. They will be thrown into the fire because their names were not written in the book of life.

God looks at situations in a very different way than we do. He looks at things under his eternal point of view. Everything He does in our lives is motivated by love that is greater than ours.

In moments of sorrow, we are not able to see the objective, as Abraham waited many years to see the promise fulfilled and Sarah still didn't give him a child; such as Joseph also couldn't see what God had planed for him; like Job that in his sorrow asked himself if God ever loved him--. And really, to think about it, those were not friends, considering the way they were accusing him. Did these men have faith? And similar to this, a true believer is suffering as he lives among mediocre Christians that all they do is give negative comments when they notice the lack of success in the believer's trail. Therefore, let's look up a little and ask the Lord to give us eyes to see.

I Chapter 4. Anatole Mijailovich

Anatole Mijailovich is maybe the most spiritual man I met in Russia. We met him during the winter of 1998 in Goriachi Kluch, where the Caucasus mountains are; about 100 Km south of Krasnodar.

Anatole Mijailovich had 13 kids and many grandchildren; maybe half of the congregation is his descendants. He was the Pastor of course. Being that his church was very spiritual, I asked him if there was a prophet among them. The reason was because I always had so many questions in my heart, especially when it comes to Russia's future work and spiritual condition of the team. Sometimes I like to have information in order to make decisions. However, my conclusion is that God doesn't and won't give us that information that we so much desire because His purpose for our lives is that we learn to wait and trust in Him, especially when circumstances are difficult.

Then I understood that even if the "prophet" I wanted to consult in order to make right decisions didn't exist, there still was a church in Goriachi Kluch and that it also is part of the Bride of Christ. They have a sound doctrine and would not easily be influenced by what someone "spiritual" would say.

One of the things that may be hard to accept is that in Christian Russian culture the people of the same sex kiss on the lips to greet each other. There is a Salvadoran brother Arnold that told me: "I will not allow anyone to kiss me". And of course, it is normal to arrive with that attitude. However, turns out that Anatole Mijailovich did things with such naturalness that Arnold ended up getting used to greeting that way.

At the beginning, it was also very strange to me, but then I held on to the spirit and understood that Anatole Mijailovich expressed his love in a very particular way. He loved his people. He is the type of person that loves his people so much that is willing to give his life for them.

We arrived at Goriachi Kluch in October of 1998; winter was starting. For \$200 a month, we rented a two story 10 room building. Besides, there was another house in that same lot. It was a recreation center for the communist party and their families. It was a much damaged place with no heating because it was only used during the summer. The following was the condition of use: we had to buy a big stove and do pipe work all through the walls of the interior and in that way hot water would flow through the pipes and keep the place warm. Personally, I thought it was impossible, but the brothers from the group that were with me, Seriosha and Aliosha said that it was easy and that they would see to it.

So they found a home made stove (\$250) and brought it over. We always used our 307 Mercedes Benz van for moving around, which we called "the lemon" because it was yellow. (The type of vans that were used in Germany to distribute mail and when they are old, they are sold very cheap).

Then all the brothers started making holes through the walls and putting pipes through them, and closing the holes with cement afterwards. Everything was done in less than two weeks.

There was a huge forest behind the grounds. We cut down fire wood of the fallen trees which were many. There was a small mountain of gravel and mud that threatened to damage some of the constructions of the complex since the rains caused erosion. It was very strange to me to see how easy it was to take fire wood non stop. We had a gasoline saw to make the work faster. The Pastor, his kids and grandkids were there and the Pastor told me: "we cannot tithe however we can help cut wood".

In reality, Anatole Mijailovich wanted to show his thankfulness for the help we gave him indirectly. During that year, his congregation gathered in a private house, a gallery under a vine that belonged to a brother of the church. However, now that it was cold it was no longer possible to gather outdoors. However, we had several places to meet that were available. So we chose the best one which was independent from where we lived (30 meters away). A large room with many windows and well illuminated. We put a diesel stove that we had brought all the way from Italy. It was the perfect place, so we decided to gather there during the 6 months of the winter. As we left the place, the church was still aloud to meet there.

Every morning, when everything was still dark, Anatole Mijailovich and his wife, hand in hand, would come to pray in that room. Laila and I lived on the second floor and from the balcony we could see them and happily greet them.

In gratitude that we had given them the place, Anatole Mijailovich encouraged the entire congregation to help us cut wood. They also took us to a place in the field where we could get coal. There was a family that hidden plenty of coal in their garden during the communist time, just when it was about to finish. So we went with shovels and dug it out.

The weird thing was that I thought we were gathering more wood and coal than necessary, however, by the end of the winter we almost ran short. Since it was south Russia I didn't think it was going to get so cold. But even it being south Russia, daily we were tossing wagon after wagon of wood and coal into the stove.

The scriptures say that everyone who lives a Godly life in Christ will suffer persecution. So, I believe it's not necessary to mention the persecution during communism times. I think there are enough books already that talk about it. But really, the most painful persecution there can be is the one coming from the church itself and its members. Only because we truly love each other, we are the only ones capable to profoundly hurting each other, because we have lived and suffered together, and so it was with Anatole Mijailovich.

For many years, he struggled to build a church and through many struggles he got the official permit and a nice building was made and the congregation met there. However, one day, Anatole was baptized with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in an unknown language. Some church members said that it was unacceptable and decided that the best thing to do was to get him out of the congregation.

With honour and dignity Anatole left. That is why he did not have a place where to minister. He never asked for help, but somehow, God always provided.

During our time in Goriachi Kluch, we attended a church where they don't believe in speaking in tongues. Almost immediately, we were verbally attacked, provocatively questioned like: saying that speaking in tongues was demons doctrine, to what Anatole sweetly responded---"Watch your words because what you are saying could be dangerous. If speaking in tongues is a spirit's gift, and not of evil, you are calling "evil" what is God's and that could be the beginning of a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit"
---At least then, they had nothing more to say.

Being that Anatole was an elderly man already, he once told me that he had seen the new generation coming up with famous outgoing pastors in Russia, people that I also had heard of. They are very well known brothers.

"I knew them since they were kids, now they are all grown up---, he told me"

He saw them climb up the success ladder in the religious circle. He was never jealous, but evidently, Anatole preferred to live anonymously. He was convinced that in order to please God it was not necessary to have great accomplishments; result of guiding a church the same way a financial success company. God's work is not about a competition game, it's all about getting closer to God in order to get closer to your neighbour.

I once invited him to share in our body meeting in the morning. It was a few days before Laila and I returned to Germany to see our kids. Then back to El Salvador (Central America). I was a little worried because I noticed there were some problems in the group. Anatole went straight to the point because he said: "It is not about a new commandment I will talk about, but about a very old one "Little ones' love one another". He said it in such a way that still, those words ring my ears.

It is very sad to know that the main reason that missionaries leave God's work is because of problems with their peers, because they can't get along.

Once winter passed, I still wished to put up the tent in Goriachi Kluch. Not only because a long move wasn't necessary but because we all saw the spiritual necessity of the place. The city had already verbally told us that it was not going to happen. But looking back at experiences in places before, they first say "no" then change their minds and agree. However, this time I decided to change strategies and I sent Nadia. (Nadia is an abbreviation for Nadieshda that means "hope"). She is a very nice and sweet sister. I told her to speak to the one in charge and that an hour later we would arrive. She was there waiting at the mayor's office. They had told her that if we wanted to help, it was best if we just gave the money we had to the Orthodox Church and that they would be in charge of preaching. It was not our responsibility. In all cases, we still had the chance to talk.

When we went into the mayor's office, they were furiously waiting, angry; asking how dare we asked for permission, they thought for sure we were in Russia illegally and they wanted to, in that moment, go back with us to the place where we lived and investigate thoroughly concerning our presence there. They followed us in their vehicle. When we arrived, we noticed that behind them, there was still more cars behind them like the governor, the mayor, the commander in chief, the one in charge of the migratory documents and some other important person. They wanted each of our personal documents. When they saw the parked vehicles, they asked for the documents of them as well with proof that they had passed inspection.

When Anatole saw what was going on, he yelled --"Poor Russia!, Poor Russia!"

His voice overcame everyone else's. He asked---"What are you here for? No delinquents live here, nor criminals, Christians live here. Why do you investigate so much? What have we done wrong?"

As a conclusion, we never got permission which was very sad because we found very good lots where many people could have attended.

We had to leave Goriache Kluch almost immediately. The owners, however, wanted us to remove the small mountain of gravel and mud that was about to slide and damage one of the buildings. During winter it would have been impossible because the ground was frozen and hard as a rock. But now that spring was here, they wanted us to dedicate to that.

---I told him we would not do it because that was not our purpose there, the group and church had already

enough work. So then, he set a time for us to leave. (The problem was that we had no where to go). We didn't get permission anywhere. He told me—if we didn't leave he would send to the bandits on us. In Russian its said “Banditi”—I told him I was not scared of them--, he answered that I was not afraid of them because I didn't know them. (Because effectively, they can be very cruel). However, we left unharmed from Goriachi Kluch.

PART II THE BEGINNING OF SPRING IN UKRAINE

II Chapter 1. Clarifying my thoughts for Russia.

In 1994, Laila and I travelled to Moscow for the first time. This trip was result of the decision that was taken by different elders of Christ is the Answer, with whom we met a year earlier in Irapuato Mexico. An attempt to raise a work in Moscow had already taken place. A group of brothers for the United States were there at the beginning of the 90s and also put up a tent since the iron wall had fallen and there was finally freedom of religion. They were spiritual and all doors were open. However, the group split up. It was a complicated situation. The tent and team in Moscow needed to be redeemed and if possible get the tent back up. The leaders asked for a volunteer and I accepted the challenge.

God provided for the air tickets from Managua, Nicaragua to Moscow. We were very excited to do this exploration and learning trip. However, during these three months, we were not able to do much since it was only us two and we were just testing the situation. We were just starting to be able to communicate and we felt the difficulty to fit in or integrate to the system. We were not able to get to an agreement with the leader of the first team either, concerning the equipment and the tent.

We met many missionaries from different countries. We visited many churches in Moscow and its surroundings. We met many Russian brothers and preachers, however, we needed a team because experience has taught us that with a group, not only would doors open but souls would get saved. We were always in touch with Koen Willie and his wife Annemie who were in charge of the “Christ is the Answer” group in Ukraine. They were in charge of a large team in Ukraine who is very effective. Wherever they went, there was always rejoicing. Literally tenths of churches were founded. Koen suggested that by the following year, we would go stay in his team and he promised to send workers for Russia.

We got organized to stay in the Ukrainian team and could see that effectively; God was visiting that nation through our brothers. When the tent was put up in Dnepropetrovsk, we had to put ropes around the camp in order to keep out people who wanted to invade us from all sides. It was something never seen before. Everyone wanted to know. It was like the nets ripping from the many fish...

Then the cold began and tent and everything was packed. We and the entire group had to go live on the outsides of Dnepropetrovsk. During the winter, we started meetings in hospitals and schools.

II Chapter 2. How the Russian team was formed.

We spent six months already with the Ukrainian team and we made many friends with the members. Koen asked for volunteers from the team members to go with us to Russia and 6 disciples decided to take this new challenge of faith: Aliosha, Oleg, Dina, Ira, Snezhana and Lioba. Also, Petia came, who was new and wanted to join the team. Sasha, a young man who was newly converted, asked if he could come. All of them were Ukrainian. Later on we had Seriosha and Oleg (Who we called “Shalom” because he always said that which meant peace in Hebrew).

Koen and Fred Sampan prayed for Gods blessings over us and the team. We were headed for the unknown since we had only communicated with the director of a Bible School, Pavel Okara, via fax. He told us: “When you arrive, we will look for a place where you can live and minister”.

Why south Russia?

In the first place, the weather was not so cold, and then the circumstance that the Ukrainian team was less than 100 km away from the Russian border. So it was an all day trip to reach the Russian border. I remember it began to rain and about 40 km before the border, a police stopped us and made us buy insurance that said would last a whole year, \$15 per vehicle. In circumstances like those, we must pay. If we begin to argue, we would run the risk of getting arrested. I asked myself, how can insurance be so cheap? Then, why would we need it for a full year when we only had a few hours left in Ukraine?

At last, we arrived to the border, vehicles, visas and everything was in order, except for one bus which was used as a kitchen. Here is a brief history of this bus Scania. (a 1962 model). About 25 years back, it was taken out of the circulation in Gothenburg, Sweden, and was donated to the team.

In 1974, when I became Christian in Italy, they called that bus “the pig”. In that time, a brother would drive it to the University of Rome to pick students up and take them to the tent. I believe I was the only one to go because back then, students thought the team members were CIA spies, which is why evangelizing had little or no success with students.

That bus was also used to take the disciples to evangelize at the Coliseum, the Vatican and other tourist places in Rome. Years later, it became a very well equipped kitchen. During the 10 years the bus was in Italy, it was never legalized but it had Illinois license plates. The USA team was a charity non profit organization so that is why the bus was registered in the US but never passed through the Italian inspection. The moves were done after midnight because there were less police on the freeway, and certainly, even though it had a property title and it was legally registered in the US, according to Italian law, it was very questionable since the import taxes were not paid nor was there any inspection done. In a few words, that bus on the road could be a threat to other vehicles.

This is something I have always asked myself: Why does it have to be like this? When someone gives a vehicle for the work of God, they give us something they no longer want, something that doesn't work, it can also be like a washing machine or computer etc.

Then, it is practically impossible to take it into other countries since the importation laws don't allow old vehicles or taxes are the value of the vehicle. We end up using it without legalizing it. By the way, in El Salvador, our motor home (or converted bus) was never legalized and we lived in it and moved it from one end to the other of El Salvador from the year 1987-1995. After we left the bus, since we went to Russia, Sergio and Alba Cabrera lived another 6 years in that same bus. Then, Victor and Edith Lopez until the beginning of 2002 when Victor had a bad accident with it since the brakes were not good. He tried to stop it taking it to the side of the road but there was a deep ditch and the bus rolled down and started on fire. Thank God, Victor who was driving and another brother that was with him came out unharmed because when the bus came to a halt, they were able to exit the bus through the front window before the whole thing caught on fire.

II Chapter 3. The team enters Russia

There we were; late in the evening at the Ukrainian-Russian border, about 15 people and 5 vehicles including the old bus. The one in charge of processing the permits for vehicles told us that he could do nothing for us that night, since he could not give us the permission for the kitchen bus, as he was not able to read the American document we had. Neither did we have a Ukrainian registration etc. So then he told us---“Go rest and come back tomorrow and then talk to the one in charge. He will tell you what you have to do”. How could we rest at a border? Especially when we didn't know what tomorrow had in store for us. You must be in a situation like that to know what it feels like...there is no way back. It's not like you can put the bus in your pocket and go, and if you can't go, leave anyway. “Where to?” Our Ukrainian visa had expired and we could not get a new one at the border.

On the bus, we had a 10 x 6 meter tent that Koen has brought from Belgium and two other tents; one that

would be used as a shower and another one for my office. We also had food, plates, and pans.

Everyone slept where they could, whether it was on the bus or vehicles. The next day, the only thing I would understand was “ploja” which means “bad” meaning they would not allow us in because of lack of documents. Seriosha was telling the person in charge “Pomogite” which means “help us”---. He answered--, I will call my boss in Rostov-on-the-Don and we shall see what he says, however, you must pay for the phone call.

It happens often that when someone urgently needs something, you end up waiting indefinitely. There was no signal, call after call--, until finally; the man was able to speak to the director in Rostov. They spoke and finally, the director told the man to let us in.

It was a miracle!

He told us—“The call cost \$5.00” At that time, I had no \$5.00 bills, so I handed him a \$10.00--. He told me he had no change--, so I answered and told him “Keep the change”.

Now, there was only one problem. None of us had a license that authorized us to drive the bus. So we had to find a man at the border that would do us the favour. This time it was easy, because the first man we asked agreed to do it. He was a Christian from the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine. He took all the responsibilities and even gave the officer a \$20.00 to accelerate the process. By then, the sisters of the group were fixing breakfast. The gas was turned on; there were pans on the stove. They were holding the pans so that they would not fall over with the bus’ movement. And that was the last vehicle to make it through. It was something extraordinary and unforgettable.

We stopped a few kilometres into Russia. First, to thank and praise the Lord and to enjoy the food prepared while moving on wheels. We were finally in; it was a 23rd day of April of 1997, strangely the day that Lenin was born.

Some of the details of our first days in Russia are written in another book.

The largest blessing was that in Bataisk (the town where we ended up staying) there was one of the Pentecostal evangelical churches that had survived the communist persecution. This town was about 10 km south of Rostov, on the other side of the Don River. Pastor Anatole Fedoruk greatly welcomed us. We had never met, however, we felt the unity in the spirit. From the very first Sunday, he gave me the liberty to share in order to explain who we were and our purpose in Russia.

Previously to that, a brother (Pavel) showed us a factory where they worked with wood and metal. The director and owner of the factory, Brother Victor Klemenko, was one of the elders of the same church. So during the time I was sharing, I mentioned that I had seen the factory and that I hoped to build our first benches there. At the end of the meeting, he came up to us and introduced himself. His factory became our second home as he let the brothers use the equipment and wood. We got 90 of the best quality, good wood and well painted benches done. Every time I asked him about the cost of all this, he would always tell me not to worry about it.

II Chapter 4. Bataisk

Those days in Bataisk, in Ulitsa Kalenina (Kalenin’s Road), they were really and truly great. Why? Because the neighbourhood received us.

At first, they looked at us with distrust; we had done a small campaign with our 10 x 6meter tent in the middle, our kitchen bus with Illinois license plates, and then my small Italian motor home. The brothers were living in the house that was only halfway finished; the owner didn’t have the money to finish it. It had been about 6 years since he had started it. The sisters lived in the last room of a very old house where the whole entrance was about to fall apart.

We dug a big whole for the toilet and the shower was at the neighbour’s yard. In Russia, you often see

arrangements in the garden used as summer showers. A barrel is filled with water and is left out in the sun to heat up (sometimes an old torpedo boat is used). This allowed us to shower with perfect temperature during the afternoon and night (at 9:00 p.m. it is still bright). We placed the barrel on something up high, poked a little hole and...ready!! A comfortable shower is ready.

Throughout the days, a weird incident made us break the ice between the neighbours. Someone found a porcupine. Yes, the young boys of the place had caught it and brought it to us. This opened the communication and that is how we even started a friendship, not only with a group of boys, but with their parents and older brothers also.

It really caught my attention the fact that the kids were playing on the streets into late hours. No one seemed to bother to call them home. They were always full of energy.

Some of them had alcoholic parents and there were always fights at home, so they would come and spend time with us. Some of them called me Uncle Pedro and they would tell me—"Let's go to the lake! "Let's go? Let's Go!" It was so strange to me that they would treat me like a family member.

I think it's a need we all have, the need to feel accepted. We were received in the neighbourhood. They would come and ask for our "Lemon" vehicle, to go on a trip or sometimes they would ask us for diesel.

There was always a drunken person coming along asking for a piece of bread, since we were actually camped on their meeting point. They had gathered on that lot for years. It was their territory and we had to pay with something for being there and they would tell us "Give us bread". About 5 or 10 of them met there to have a drink of their Vodka and of course, wanted to accompany it with some sort of food. They would tell us—"If you are Christians and came to help us, then help us with bread!"—we would always answer: "It's not that type of help you all need". After about half an hour of insisting they would up and leave.

One time, one of them came, pretty drunk already and had a knife in his hand. He said he wanted to speak to me. Just because he was drunk didn't necessarily mean that he would be weak, in fact this one had a bull's strength. The brothers of team told me to hide. However, he insisted and threatened saying—"If Pedro doesn't show up, I will cut up all my body". And as he said that, he started cutting himself along his arm and started to bleed. I'm sure he was not looking for me to hurt me, I could sense that in his spirit and that he only wanted attention, but everyone else told me to stay inside. Finally, he decided to leave when Brother Sasha defied him to go with him to the lake right by. Sasha is a big and strong brother and was able to get the man into the water and then took him on his shoulders and carried him home. This one, like many others that allowed alcohol to control their lives not only caused problems on the streets but at home as well. I could hear his daughter crying at night sometimes.

What I like the most about the Russian people was their very deep feeling of friendship. I thought that Italians went ahead, but in Russia, everyone who came by to see us, made us feel like part of their family.

Sometimes I would ask the young men to read me the Russian lessons out loud as I recorded them and learned it better. Another thing that helped me get new friends was to take pictures of the young boys and girls and then sell them to their parents. Afterwards, it was the parents that would come up to me and then there was people all day long wanting to take pictures. I sold them for only 2 Roubles (regular price for a picture was 10 roubles) because my objective was never to make money but to take part in their mentality and feeling, capture their spirit and find out how to get to them.

Meanwhile, the brothers finished the first benches at the factory so we went to pick them up and brought them to camp. A lady wanted to buy one, so I explained that they were not for sale but for her to sit on them when she came to the tent meetings.

Then we began with the meetings. It was mostly kids that would come. Laila, Dina and Snezhana sang happy songs with movements and got so many kids engaged. The brothers from church began to bring their children and days later, the police showed up. They scheduled us for questioning and we arrived at the Police Station where they kept us for hours. They wanted to know what kind of doctrine was being taught to the children.

For the police, our testimonies made no sense; thank God they never arrested us.

Other than the fact that some people opposed, Russia was open to the Gospel.

We had to move quickly because in Italy there was a tent that was at our disposition and we, personally, had to go pick it up. It was stored in a truck called “Glory to God” (an old Scandia), which was also given to us.

The church at Bataisk gave the group a place to stay during the winter. Laila and I flew from Rostov to Rimini, Italy with a Russian airline—Donavia. Pippo Totaro and Walter D’Andolfo came to pick us up at Rimini airport. They travelled a long way all the way from Pescara (Italy) to pick us up.

II Chapter 5. Italy

Our flight from Rostov to Rimini was 6 hours behind. Pippo who is a Policeman asked what was going on and they told him that in Rostov, the plane ran out of gasoline. Then, we had to wait for a plane that came from Israel and then send all the passengers to Rimini. Meanwhile in Rostov, they never told us the reason of the delay.

The next day, we went to “Banca di Roma” (Bank of Rome), where we had our account. We found out that we were over \$300.00 in the red. I usually took out money at ATM cashiers, and I didn’t always have the information needed about our bank account. It was definitely a good start for our faith.

If we kept the \$300.00 we would have enough to be able to take a train all the way to Rome, however, if we deposited them, we would end up with too little. One thing that I learned throughout the years in El Salvador was,—to leave a country without money, I would always return in abundance, and not only that, but during that trip, we never needed anything. So I decided not to worry. We were invited to share in Rimini and the Lord provided.

In Rome, like always, Pastor Agostino Masdea received us, a man for whom I hold a lot of respect as he is always sensible to the needs of others. In Rome, we got our visas to return to Ukraine then to Russia. There was Emanuele Iaseca who was part of the team in Ukraine. Without saying anything, he gave us 100,000 Liras (around \$45), saying he was praying for us. Then we took the train to Siderno, in Calabria where the team was.

Like I previously said: The 1960 Scania truck, called “Glory to God” was almost ready. The big tent was already in there; however, they had taken all the ropes to use it with the new tent. We had to buy 1km of rope: with 88 side poles and 9m of rope for each of them, total it would come out to 792 m. Of course, we had to take extras. Then, we had to buy the side curtains for the tent.

Truly, God used Brother Paolo Schafer. I was amazed to see how Paolo found a store just a few kilometres away where they were everything we needed. I thought we would have to go to north Italy. Then, at that same place they did the curtains. And, to pay? Okay, he introduced me to a few brothers. There was a small group of believers that invited me to share and then they said that they had gathered funds for building but, they felt from the Lord that it was best to give us the money and invest it in preaching the Gospel in Russia.

It was a miracle after another.

Even brother Clark Slone called from Tennessee telling Paolo Schafer to have us take also the 508 Mercedes Benz with us to Russia. This vehicle came from the team in Portugal. There we put a bunk bed and a barrel to fill with diesel for our trip in Ukraine and Russia since gas stations in Ukraine were hard to find at that time.

We also put some things we needed to drop off at the Ukrainian team and then our personal belongings.

A month later, we took off heading north. Our first stop was at Terracina where 25 years ago, we had many friends. Brother Antonio di Mario had a large workshop and was willing to help us. So they performed the last inspections to “Glory to God” (the Scania truck) and “Behemoth” (The Mercedes 508).

Why Behemoth? Like every other vehicle, we would name them in order to identify them easily. This is how it went: Sister Dina made an observation pointing towards the vehicle saying “An authentic Behemoth! However, a chubby brother who had sympathies towards her was standing right next to it and thought she was maybe referring to him. We all thought it was very funny. Aliosha said that it was “the Behemoth Anton” because the license plate said AHT that in Russian said ANT or Anton—Anthony.

Laila and I travelled in Behemoth. Pino Sanzi and Danilo Tosto were in “Glory to God” with the tent, a wheel barrel, two big diesel heaters, medicine, food, and used clothing.

I knew that “Glory to God” had not passed inspection for the past 3 years, it had a Belgium license plate and the registration had expired. According to the laws, that truck had no right to travel because the documents were expired for 3 years now.

Travelling north, at Ferrara, we stopped to sleep at a Rest Area. At these gas stations, there are all kinds of services. Another thing that caught my attention was the fact that people were buying lottery tickets again and again.

II Chapter 6. Leaving Italy

I always had the idea that if I had more money, life would be even more complicated since I would have to better evaluate every decision of how to use it and give account since we all have to give account of how we spent our funds that God put in our hands.

I thought, “How is it possible that these people want even more?” The more they have, the more they want and the more complicated things get.

I think that thought came from the circumstance that I was under much pressure. Many brethren in Italy that had deprived themselves from comfort and had trusted me with part of their resources to promote a job that was larger than my strength. There was a huge risk to lose it all, and risk to not getting there. Even if we got there, we would have to deal with importation rules. Then the tent didn’t have a structure. I had to travel to Ochtendung, Germany to get a hold of cranks. Brothers from the “Mobile Christians” helped me out. Walter, one of the members took us to a special shop. He wanted the cranks to get shipped to Russia since they had to be ordered, however; it was not possible. I knew of another German ministry “Nehemia” that regularly sends things to Ukraine. We made an agreement with them they would send it...but, how was I supposed to know that everything would turn out right? I had a feeling that I was getting into something I didn’t know about, something that I wasn’t supposed to do, there were too many risks. Then, look for lots in Russia and to struggle with authorities. I questioned myself if the group had enough strength to keep moving. It was like asking if they had enough faith to walk on water, since humanly speaking it was impossible, unless God totally identified himself with us.

I would sleep and wake with that same thought. The heavens...silent; Brotherly help...way too far” Experiences like these really make us question our faith. It is then when these sayings come to life:

- 1.—We have done so much for so long with so little that now we will try to do the impossible with nothing.
- 2.—We have not trusted God if we haven’t trusted him for the impossible.
- 3.—If we don’t believe in miracle, we are not realistic.
- 4.—Don’t start a project unless it’s impossible. That way, if you conquer it, you will know it was God and not you.
- 5.—A man’s faith is proportional to the obstacle he has to conquer.

Faith is not being in a big church meeting with an emotional atmosphere and the Pastor’s preaching makes us feel strong and secure. Faith is being tested during the hardest moments, when we are alone and even when we have the impression that God has abandoned us because everything is going wrong.

The road was very foggy; I could hardly see the vehicle ahead of me. The traffic moved slowly throughout the whole trip until the highway brought us around Venice and Trieste...then we arrived to the Slovenian border.

The next morning, I could hear a new language already. I recognized certain Russian words that I couldn't understand. I asked some of the bus drivers that were in line with me if they spoke Russian and no one did. Then I began to repeat some of the Russian words they said and they all began to laugh. Then I came to the conclusion that Slovenian or half Slovenian languages have words in Russian.

Things began to get complicated because all the workers were busy and paid no attention to me or other bus drivers. After a few hours we moved on and left Italy.

Already on the Slovenian side, a man saw our documents and told me---“You can't”

II Chapter 7. The Slovenian Border

“Because your documents aren't in order, you don't have an Invoice and I don't know what you are bringing through”. To be honest, I didn't know what the word “invoice” meant. Years later, I learned that an “Invoice” is a document that lists everything someone is bringing through and must be authorized by customs.

--I told him, I'm bringing a tent and humanitarian help for Russia.

--Yes, but you don't have an official document listing what you're bringing.

--I can write it for you right now.

--Its not enough, you needed to get the stamp of the institution who gave it to you or one of the representatives before you left.

--I am one of the representatives.

--Where is the proof?

--I showed him a document without a stamp

--This is not enough, go back to Italy.

--I can't go back and I will not go back! You have to help me. PLEASE HELP ME! I WILL NOT GO BACK! I only want to go through your country. Give me permission.

After arguing for 20 minutes I understood he was the director. Besides Slovenian, he was fluent with English and Italian. When he saw how determined I was he told me—tell the institution that gave you this to fax you a detailed list of what you are bringing and to include an insurance incase something happens on the way. The group in Italy is itinerating and does not have a fax machine, not to mention a list of these things as it was never written. I came to the conclusion that the fax was not an option. I told him I myself would write the list, he would go through it, stamp it and it would also work for the next borders. I explained to him that the team in Italy didn't have a fax machine.

--Anyone else in Europe? He asked me. Then it came to my mind “Dirk Bawens” in Belgium. He has the documents and stamps we need. I gave the director Dirks phone number. After a few minutes, I noticed him on the phone. I didn't think he would be speaking to Dirk, but he was. Afterwards, he got closer and handed me the phone through the window. It was Dirk and in a few words, I confirmed what the man was saying.

He told me with his Belgium accent:

--Listen Pedro, I don't want somebody knocking at the door of my house, telling me that you didn't leave a paper when you left the country and that I have to pay thousands of dollars.

--No Dirk, I'm going to take care of all the papers. I'll be sure to leave the documents at the border and I will send everything to you by mail, once I get to my destiny.

--Yes, but this has happened to me before. I know how those little countries are. They can really get you into trouble.

--Yeah Dirk, but you know this is something of faith. Have Faith!

--Yes, that is what you “Christ is the Answer” people say...and what about if there is an accident?

--Dirk, there will be no accident. Have faith! You have to help me.

--Yes, he said, being in that situation is being as being in hell.

With that, I could see that he understood everything and that made me think in that type of agony, when we feel that the storm threatens and rumbles, an all out spiritual war where risk pays off with extraordinary dimensions, were we don't know what's going to happen and the heavens stay quiet.

I wonder if preachers that make everything seem so easy have been through a situation like this. Not to put myself in a superior plan but I asked myself if in hell, we would be better off.

Of course, there is no comparison because hell is a place of embarrassment and complete confusion because we have resisted the truth, because we loved darkness more than light and because our deeds are evil.

However, what I want to get to is that in hell, we no longer have anything to loose, and there is no battle. Things can't get any worse.

II Chapter 8. Mexico

Like 5 years before, I asked myself the same question when I was at the El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico border. We were driving a large school bus. It was filled with things were taking to El Salvador and the customs officials were not letting us through. They told us that it was the wrong border to go through. Then, I asked myself, --is hell better?

--Why did I have to put myself into this?

Then my Christian common sense tells me—because Jesus said to preach the Gospel to the world, and this is what we have to go through in order to get it done! It's a step of faith. He promised to be with us and that nothing will be impossible if we believe. But then, it doesn't seem to be that way. It is easy to drive off to a different border but then most likely, they will tell us the same thing over and over in each border.

How do we face a defeat? A loss that involves those who have sacrificed for the cause, maybe spending months away their family, because a loss brings its consequences. That is why; many rather stay in civil security and their countries good economy, without having to take risks.

Talking about defeats and failure, some get to the point of suicide, when they loose all hope, when they think God has taken them as enemies.

Certainly, it was not yet at that point. I am only sharing this so we can have mercy on people who have been defeated and to try to be supportive and strengthening.

Dirk was very generous because he made himself responsible. The border director sent him a fax; Dirk filled it out, signed it, put an official CITA Belgium stamp on it and sent it back. It was great that Dirk was at home at that time and even answered the phone. Dirk is a very busy man. He has 12 kids (or more?) he was an employee of SEBENA, (the Belgium air line) and did not attend work that day. It was also great that the director called—handed me the phone and allowed us to use his fax.

I made a list of everything that was on the bus. It was impossible to list some things like: how many kilos of sugar, how many cans of tuna, what medicines, clothing, milk, cables, and of course, the tent. The director made photocopies and stamped it for the next borders. I thanked him in the Name of the Lord for his help. He said good bye and said that I would have problems at the next border and would not be able to get through because we were still lacking **TIR** (The official custom document to get through borders).

It was late but still not dark so we continued our trip. There were no longer any freeways, only city roads and sometimes stop lights.

We parked our vehicles and stopped to rest. We had dinner in a small restaurant and went to bed. At sun rise, when I woke up, I saw an extraordinary mountain range where mist was rising. It was one of those views that while only watching them, you feel invited to stay and live there. Lord how beautiful is all what you have done! It is more beautiful than I can express with my own words! Even if we had to loose it all, it was worth seeing such impressive part of creation.

By the way, I remember that a year later (1998), a place east of Bataisk, called R.D.V.S., was the first time I

preached to a large group of non Christian Russians. It was outdoors and I spoke about that same theme, I used Yuri Gagarin, the first Russian astronaut as an example. The time when he went to space and said—“Where is God?...I don’t see him”. His objective was to demonstrate that there was no God because he never saw Him and nevertheless, my message was:--When I look to the heavens, I see God, because the heavens count the Glory of God. I see God in the harmony of the universe and nature. I saw the creator of creation. On that mist I saw rising from the mountains, and in the tranquility it expressed and I told myself that whatever happened, I would trust in Him.

By the way, about Yuri Gagarin. I once read something I found very funny about him. Nikita Kruchev privately asked him:

--When you were in the cosmos, did you see God?

--Yes, Yuri answered.

--Then don’t tell anyone! Answered Nikita Kruchev.

Years later, Yuri Gagarin visited Rome and the Vatican, the Pop asked him:

--When you were in the cosmos, did you see God?

--No! Yuri answered

--Don’t tell anyone! The Pop said.

I think this joke demonstrates something about our nature, that whatever we believe, even if its not true, people try to convince others about it by believing and believe that while other people believe in what we do, more possibilities there is of it being true.

That’s why, the only sin that cannot be forgiven is when in our spirit, we oppose to the true spirit. In other words, when we can no longer be truthful with ourselves. Trust me, it is very easy to deceive ourselves. The bad part is that there is no forgiveness for it.

J.J. Rousseau said: Reasoning can deceive us, conscience can’t. As I understand, Rousseau was atheist. I would like to add something to his thought---even our conscience can play tricks on us, depending on the knowledge we have gained throughout our childhood and youth.

There is no greater deceiver than the human’s heart. Our hearts can deceive our feelings and emotions.

The Holy Spirit is the one who never deceives. When He comes, he will convict the world of guilt, in regard of sin, righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8) For Him to communicate with us we must look and love the truth *at any cost*.

If there is something that I would want Jesus to tell me is, what He said when he saw Nathaniel for the first time:--Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!

And before ending this chapter, I would like to say that in the previous years being in Ukraine or Russia, I asked friends: How did Yuri Gagarin end up? Almost everyone told me—it seems like he got shot or that he died in a psychiatric hospital or maybe in a plane accident.

To you reader I leave the comments.

II Chapter 9. Slovenian Bridges

We continued with our trip.

Laila and I were driving ahead with the “Behemoth”. Pino and Danilo were behind us. We usually were able to see them through the review mirror. It was a pretty view. Slovenia was like Switzerland, green lands, everything very well taken care of. The director had told me: We don’t have war. Yes, it was evident because it wasn’t like other nations of ex Yugoslavia. So, effectively, Slovenia was a tiny paradise very similar to north Italy, Austria and Switzerland.

Laila looked at the map and compared the roads and I calmly drove. We felt very good. We knew another battle was ahead of us; however, we were enjoying the view.

Sometimes there were wood bridges with warnings saying it could only handle a certain amount of weight.

The “glory to God” truck was not very big, I thought for sure it would make it and I looked at it through the review mirror. I felt happy when I saw Pino and Danilo make it across the bridges because I imagined that the truck wouldn’t make it because of its overweight. How would Dirk feel when he would find out? What would he say? How much would we have to pay, or serve in jail? We knew at the border that the truck was overweight because at the border, we had to pay about half a million Liras (about \$250), but Danilo, somehow, convinced the one in charge to forgive us this fine.

To be honest, I didn’t know the road and the map was not accurate with the roads, which happens frequently. If it wouldn’t have been able to continue that road, I wouldn’t know about a different route to take. I only thought, we will for sure make it! We were passing bridge after bridge and thank God we made it with no problem.

We can say we have faith, but if we don’t have works to demonstrate it then we don’t have faith. A bridge can say it has a 100 ton resistance, but a 90 ton truck drives over it and it falls, then it was not true. We could say we have faith, but in reality, our faith was not enough in order to resist. In other words, believing we have faith and actually having faith are two very different things.

In architecture, I learned about the security measures for a building in order to be able to support different loads. There is also the wind to consider. Every construction is made to resist much more than they should since we all have the tendency to push everything to its limits. For such reason, we must prevent and foresee whatever can be over weight. Did those bridges resist thanks to the security measurements? I will never know.

What I do know is that God tests our faith, like He tested those who had authentic faith like Abraham, Joseph Daniels, Shadrach, Meshac, and Abed Nego.

Faith does not involve that everything we ask in prayer shall be given to us. It is more like a conviction that is being tested during the hardest times of our lives.

Like two credit cards. One has been blocked, another one hasn’t. One works with the secret code, the other one doesn’t. They look the same but you can never tell the difference until you use them.

In Germany, they sell the “Telefon Karte”. One with no credit and the other one with credit, they look the same but you will never know which one works until you try them out. Could that cord resist a ton? We can never tell until it is tested. Same thing with faith. When God allows certain circumstances in our lives, we discover of what material we are. Is there conviction or have we created a god according to our convictions?

Religion is cheap and doesn’t save us. God does not give us special offers “more for less money”. The one who sells the cheapest is because he sold the most, and he sold the most because he sells the cheapest. In God’s glory, there is no “good, pretty, and cheap”, we must pay the price. A price that is at anyone’s level: YOUR LIFE. The one who finds his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life because of me will find it. [\(Matthew 10:39\)](#)

II Chapter 10. Entering Hungary

--Zurück! Zurück!

--Unfortunately, I knew what this German word meant.

--Go back! Go back!

It was what the Hungarian guard was yelling at Pino Sanzi as he tried to go through the border. He continued to yell at him and then came another one along to keep yelling at him. I only said:

--Pino, non ritornare! (Pino, don’t go back!)

Of course, it was not allowed to park where we were. So I told him: Aspettami! (Wait for me).

For Laila and I, there was no problem to cross, so I brought the Behemoth about 300 meters ahead where I found a parking lot; I told Laila to stay there and pray.

Afterwards she told me *she had never prayed so intense in her entire life.*

I ran to where they were, the police was already somewhat calm. “Glory to God” was still parked in the same spot--. When the police saw me he said, “Zurück!”

--Pino told me: “Non vuole lasciarci pasare” (he doesn’t want to let us through)
I felt desperate--. I told him and Danilo, **“The only thing we can do now is pray”** so we did. We all went on our knees on the grass and invoked His name. I asked: **“God, for you nothing is impossible—do a miracle!”**—I raised my arms and said—**I believe in you, Lord.**

I asked the cops if I could speak to the director. The word “director” is the same in almost all languages therefore he understood and I asked the brothers to come along.

Afterwards I found out that the group in Italy was praying for us at that same time because they felt we were going through hard battle of faith.

There were many busy looking people in their office. I don’t speak Hungarian at all, not even one word. All I know is that it is a very strange language. No one spoke any other language there. The police was also there and it was evident that we were with the director since he was sitting behind a big desk and had a military uniform. I spoke to him in Italian which is the language I speak the best in and can show my emotions and frustration. I explained everything even though he didn’t understand a word. He never bothered to look at me; however when I was done, he gave an order to a couple of officials and we followed them.

--For a moment I thought:

--What if he gave them orders to arrest us?

However, I trusted it wasn’t like that because I saw the spirit of his order and his attitude. He ordered us to open the truck. The guards wanted us to take everything out of the truck which was basically impossible because of the weight of the 8 sections of the big tent. We needed at least 5 men and metal bars. So they decided to take three hours and go through paperwork, paperwork again, official agencies and more paperwork. What’s weird is how almost everyone in every border looks the same, they are more interested in watching TV than actually doing their work, and of course, they could care less how others feel.

Anyways, they went thoroughly through everything. They made us pay, pay and pay again of course until they finally let us through. We didn’t really get a chance to see Hungary since it was so dark. I remember the great gas stations.

On Sunday, we drove through Bucharest. Really and truly, you can smell history in that town. We traveled all day. A kilometre before arriving to the Ukrainian border, I was thinking---“How are we going to make it through the border?” Pino did not have a visa to go through Ukraine, only Laila, Danilo and I, and none of us had a license to be able to drive “glory to God” through. Of course, we called Koen to send Seriosha and Liosha but this was days ago. All of a sudden...there was Seriosha waiting along the road and he had just arrived. He had managed to get what is called an international passport and was able to come to Hungary and waiting for us by the roadside he would be able to drive the truck. Pino Sanzi found a ride back to Italy with another truck driver.

Praise be to the Lord who put everything together at that perfect moment, when we needed it the most.

However, our challenge of faith continued. We were at the Chop border all night long. The truck was parked in with all the other vehicles going through, in a place that seemed like a prison, surrounded with electrified barbed wire. It is really a border between two worlds.

The entire staff looked exhausted. It is really a strong impression when entering Ukraine and even worse, entering Russia. Sad faced, gloomy and pale expressions like if a dark cloud was over them. They looked at us with no trust whatsoever. We had to go through so many offices. In one office, they told us they were going to confiscate everything because we had no certificate of hygiene for the food and clothing we were bringing.

Days before there was a scandal when a load of humanitarian help went through with used clothing which was full of all kinds of insects and caused a plague in Ukraine. Therefore, they were so strict on anything that would enter their country.

After many offices, lots of money to pay and more offices, they inspected the vehicle.

It made the guards laugh when they saw it.

They said—is this vehicle from the Second World War or what?

--I was so tired that I fell asleep on the chair and I don't remember anything else. It was 4 a.m.

II Chapter 11. Ukraine

And that is how we made it into Ukraine. Seriosha and Aliosha were happy and so were we.

We felt our faith being strengthened.

They arrived with a good vehicle that Koen lent to them, that had been donated by the “Mobilen Christen”. Laila and I went through the borders in that car and they drove the large vehicles. I was no longer preoccupied when a police stopped us, except once that I actually made a wrong turn.

They told me I was a transgressor and asked to see my passport. It seemed like he didn't want to give it back. The Police officer began to laugh as I evangelized him and as I asked for forgiveness if I had done something wrong. But he only laughed even more—that was already a 30 minute delay for everyone. Eventually he just let me go.

Another thing that gave us great strength was when arrived to the Ukrainian team two days later. We bought several big bags of potatoes throughout the trip and since they were not washed we got seats and beds full of dirt. Danilo's boots got ruined because the barrel filled with diesel was not sealed correctly so every time there was a speed bump, it spilled.

---“Well” I said, “it's the way Ukraine welcomes you”.

Affectively, God blessed Danilo because several years later, he found a virtuous woman in Ukraine who he married and they are now living in Catania, Sicily. His parents, Enrico and Tania are very happy about this.

--Oh Danilo! You didn't go to be a fisher of men but fisher of women--.or is it that you ended up being fished?

They told me a story that once happened to Danilo, like it happened to Arnold and me. It was that in Russian, “o” is pronounced “a”. So they say, Danila, Pedra, or Arnolda. At first, we thought it was said on purpose or just to be bothered, but they seemed so serious. Those are one of the humiliations one must go through in order to get involved in the culture. The fun part is that almost all the masculine names that end in diminutive end with an “a”: Dima, Liosa, Petia, Sasha, Yura, Seriosha...for a Latino, it sounds funny.

As I mentioned before, it was a relief to see Koen, Annemie, their children and each and every one of the brothers. I don't remember what town we were in. The entire camp was up. There were many meetings, however lots of mud since it was constantly raining.

---Monse told me “If you've come this far, the rest is a piece of cake”.

That gave me hope since we were decided to arrive to Russia.

If we went through all the borders before this, we would also be able to go through the last one that was ahead of us.

Koen wanted us to stay a little longer but I wanted to see the group in Russia and wanted to get to the end of the story. That is how we said goodbye and hit the road again...the fact of arriving to the border gave me so much joy. I recognized familiar Russian smells. I no longer saw the people so sad.

However, once again, problems began. The truck could not go through and this time, it was definite. We didn't have the invoice, which is the list of the things we were bringing. There were things they didn't know if it be allowed to enter Russia. The paper work we had was not official.

They were going to put the truck on a special parking place and most likely confiscate everything in it. They did not understand how we ever made it to that point. How did other countries let it go through?

The people in customs asked us, what was inside. I don't know if unconsciously or on purpose the officer ripped the seal with the stamp that the Hungarian officials put. Then he opened the door. He was so close to getting a box full of milk packs falling on him.

Meanwhile, the brothers of the team arrived in "The Lemon" (our 307 Mercedes van). We were all very excited to see them. Sasha, who was very funny, got into the truck and took out a green wheel barrel that brother Nino Campicelli had given us. He began to fill it with can food, sugar and milk.

Dina told him: "Sasha what are you doing?"

--"I'm only taking out some stuff--, there's nothing wrong with it"

And before the authorities' eyes, he made two trips back and forth to "the Lemon" with the filled wheel barrel and began to drink milk that we had brought.

We explained to the team what the authorities told us and I told Sister Dina:--"This is where my faith ends; I have no more strength left in me."

--Dina said: "Now that I see the truck, **now my faith begins.**" I will move around in Rostov, with customs and whatever it takes, I will get permission for that truck. God has brought you and the tent all the way here and He is not going to leave us like this.

For Laila and me, it was no problem to enter Russia, we had our visas. So we all went through, together with "Behemoth" but the truck "Glory to God" that stayed at the border.

Then they told us,--"you will have to pay a \$200.00 fine for each day the truck is parked here.

II Chapter 12. Russia

This time I was in Russia, my heart felt heavy. I realized we were asking customs something that was impossible. One of the chiefs rudely told Dina, "What to you want ma'am, for me to get fired?"

In other words they were going to be harsh on us, there were no exceptions.

Certainly, the possibility existed and there was no guarantee that the tent would make it through the border.

We arrived to the house of Karla Libknejtá happy to have a bed to sleep on. In my room I hung a map of Russia. I had but a table, my books and my uncertainty.

I believe its moments like these that make us reflect and pray that God does a miracle. It was no longer in my hands. It was in the groups, they would be in charge.

**Above it all, it was God
Who was going to manifest
His power to our favor.**

Dina, who was our administrator, never knew how to take "no" for an answer. She had that temper that changed destinies. She had (I believe she still does) an unbreakable determination. The next morning, Aliosha and she went to the border, before they left I said—"bring results, no excuses!" She began to laugh and said—"yes, Pedro."

They didn't come back, noon came along, so did night time, sunrise, and they still weren't back. I was physically and emotionally so exhausted that I only thought—maybe everything is going well or maybe they had an accident...noon came along again, sunrise and finally, at noon time they were back..."where were you for so long?" They answered—"we had to go all the way to the team in Ukraine to get and do some

paperwork. Things are complicated but somehow, we will get through. The truck is still parked there”.

It was trips and trips in Rostov, official stamps, faxes applications etc. Dina cut out stamps, made copies and sent messages from one place to another in Rostov, as if she just came from Italy everything “legal”.

Five days later, I accompanied them to the border and we entered the director's office. He had about 6 of our sheets on his desk. He called the other director in Rostov on the phone but he wasn't there. He tried to call him again, this time by radio and it took like 25 minutes. At the end, he found who he was looking for. He explained everything thoroughly, question, answer, question, and answer. At the end the director in Rostov said: “Let that truck through with everything inside. We will inspect it at the Rostov customs”.

When he turned the radio off, there was a total silence in his office as he said with an exclamation:--“Bog iest!” (God exists)--he himself, couldn't believe it.

The good thing was, they didn't even charge us the \$200 a day fine for the parking, as the truck had been there for 6 days already, that means \$1000. There also was no longer a need to come to the border every day. I have always thought that for our faith to increase, we must give steps that expose us to larger losses each time.

Once the vehicle went through with the tent, it was not about a possibility now, it was a fact. There had to be a way out of this, because things couldn't simply disappear and come back on their own. However, it could be more dangerous trying to just return or escape.

I don't mean by this that we have to be irresponsible or to tempt God, like Satan told Jesus when He was in the desert. -- If you are son of God, through yourself down (from the temple) for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. What I do want to say is that many times we doubt about his word. We want guarantee. We don't want to expose ourselves to be called “Crazy for Christ” but we would like to be called “wise for Christ”.

Just like the people of Israel during their pilgrimage in the desert, were often tempted to just go back to Egypt. We fall in the same category if we try to run away from the difficulties, and that's what I'm referring to when I say it's more dangerous to go back.

II Chapter 13. Brownsville TX

To illustrate this fact, I would like to share about when in 1986, we were at the border between Brownsville, Texas and Matamorros, Mexico. After a year and a half in Mexico, preaching in many towns, it was absolutely necessary to leave because our visas and permission for our vehicles were expiring. We left from Tamaulipas to enter Texas. Two families and a single sister: Laila and myself, Sven and Inger Petersson with their kids Aril and Tabitha and Sister Cristina Jacobsson.

We were in Padre Islands for three days before trying to return, since it was necessary to be outside Mexico for a few days. In such way that we had to process our visas again. I rather not mention where we were able to get a 180 day visa (aprox. 6 months). Everything was perfectly legal, just that almost always the immigration officials get higher profits and less comfort for us.

To enter Mexico, there are two control stations. The first one is at the border itself and the second one 70 kilometres into the Mexican border for those that will enter the country for a longer period of time. We got our 180 day visa authorized at the first border; however we had to present that same paper to the authorities at the second border.

I want to clarify that in those times, it was prohibited for a foreigner to enter Mexico to preach. It is a very old law from the 1800 established by Benito Juarez. Before this, only Spanish catholic priests had the right to perform Mass where the “messages” had a direct influence to the people which was precisely what Benito Juarez didn't want.

Juarez said: Why can't Mexican priests share? They most likely also have a message. Therefore from now on, we will only have national preachers, that is catholic priests, since Catholicism was the official religion and there was nothing else. For this reason we were forced to enter and stay as tourists, but as it happens many times in Latin America, laws are not always obeyed.

When we arrived to the second border 70 km ahead, they could not believe we had the 180 day visa. But there it was. Then, the one in charge of the second border asked me:--why I had put Tapachula as my final destiny. He told me I could put any other place in Mexico's interior except Tapachula, which was in the state of Chiapas, south, close to the border with Guatemala. -- Then I answered, "Because I had no other city in mind".

He saw my passport which is French and saw that I was born in El Salvador. So I told him that by faith, I would leave Mexico in 180 days to go to El Salvador where I would start an evangelistic work.

He didn't believe me. However, he had no way to prove the contrary. It was only a proposal that I had put before the Lord, to send me back to my country and preach the Gospel.

The final destiny thing was only a formality since a tourist can move in the interior of Mexico in any direction. However, on the visa, we must write where our final point is.

He told me: "You can't put Tapachula"--."Why?" I asked--, "because you can't. You can put any other state except Chiapas"--"Why?" Chiapas is part of Mexico...

We spent the next 20 minutes this way, he was explaining his theories about who I was and what I was doing there which were all false. I explained to him everything I could think of as he listened. He had to let us through; he had to follow the law.

However, I still asked him on my way out why I couldn't put Chiapas and he answered: "because what you are doing is avoiding traffic taxes by saying you are a tourist when you are only passing through the country". --"No" I said, "if you are only passing through, we only have five days. We will be here 180 days".

We went through Tamaulipas reaching the city of Vittoria, and there we met with the brothers from the group. Together we put up the tent, preached, and people almost always filled the tent and made decisions for Christ.

In October of 1986, there was a huge earthquake in San Salvador. Bill Lowery decided to gather help for the victims and asked us if we wanted to drive down to El Salvador to distribute it.

I had my days well calculated. If we entered July 15th, we had until January 15th, 1987 to leave. January the 13th at the border of Tecun Uman, Chiapas and Guatemala the officer told me: "You are illegal!"---"Why?" I asked--, "because you have the right to be here 180 days not 6 months. There are months with 31 days."

We began to carefully and honestly count the days. That was our last day.

--"You see!" I told him, "today is day 180; I can still be in Mexico until midnight. My bus and I". They stared at each other because many times, they intend to take advantage of the people travelling. It is always obvious and you can feel it in the air, but this time we were able to leave Chiapas with no problem and enter Guatemala, arriving directly to El Salvador.

**This showed me that God
Has our time in his hands.
He synchronizes everything in such a precise and detailed way.**

This is something that happened to me only once. It was something personal, between God and me. I think no one else. Only Laila knew it. Sometimes we want to use these testimonies as reference or as a formula, but we can't. Everything that God does is original and different from the previous one.

That bus (1960 Ford) was our home for more than 10 years. From January 1984 to December 1996 it was a miracle bus. It took us to the most distant places in El Salvador like Tacuba, when the roads were still dirt

roads, Villa Victoria in Cabañas, El Espino beach in Usulután. Afterwards, Sergio Cabrera brought it to the most inaccessible places in Morazán. It was an “unbelievable” bus.

II Chapter 14. The big tent enters Russia

Okay, the testimony I shared was just something that happened long ago. However it reminded me how God has done good things for us in the past and it made me feel stronger, in order to face new challenges of faith.

The tent was still at customs. It was not going to be easy to get it out of customs. I trusted God to use Dina to get it...and sure enough, He did.

It would be way to long and boring to mention the long endless waits in offices. Then, “the person who is in charge of this and that is not in today, he will be back until Tuesday”...then on Tuesday they get angry at us for getting there late. Then there are always people who are in charge of blocking the process.

When everything is about to turn out well, they say that the fire control document is missing and if the tent starts on fire, it can be dangerous for the Russian people. If not, they will come up with a reason to stop the process of getting the tent through. Actually, there is a famous author that wrote a book about a citizen that committed suicide because he felt so frustrated because he couldn't do anything due to the government employees who didn't understand him and it was impossible to obey all the laws.

Finally, the truck was released including the tent. We parked everything in Brother Victor Klimenko's parking lot at the factory. To all this, we had to go all the way to Kiev, Ukraine to pick up the cranks that were sent to us from Germany. The brothers went to pick it up in “the Lemon”, a 4 day trip and came back with the cranks but with the front window of the van broken.

They could feel the opposition in the air. It was so strong; they said it felt like they could cut the air with a knife.

Then, we began with the structure which took a very slow process. It was mid summer so we decided to start a campaign in Bataisk without the tent. We met with Pastor Anatole Fedoruk and often went to the mayors' office. We spoke to the vice-mayor. It was like they felt indignant when they saw our boldness to ask for so much time. Thirty days of campaign was exaggerated. The church had never asked for so much, then, the places where we wanted to put the tent up were not available because we would disrupt the town's tranquillity.

After insisting, they gave us a lot in a village outside of Bataisk called R.D.V.S., however, it was only for 10 days. So we took off with a 10 x 6 meter tent and arranged it as the stage with the sound system, we put the benches in front and campers around the lot. Everything looked great.

Our first guest was a young mafia man that said: they would protect us from bad people if we gave them a certain amount of money. At that moment, the pastor Fiudoruk was there and thanked him for his offer but said that there was One, very powerful, who had always protected us and started to evangelize him.

Thank God, no one gave us any problems while we were there. It was more like we were getting to know the authentic Russian people because the place was filled with young people, alcoholics, grandmas and some workers.

The people were very kind and helpful. Many told us—“if you ever need anything, please let us know, we are here to serve you”. They always listened attentively during the meetings and thanked us afterwards for being there. It was so surprising to see how many people came up the altar call every night. Russia was very open to the Gospel. Sometimes we couldn't wait to put up the big tent and for the team to materialize in order to work in a constant and efficient way.

PART III

THE BIG TENT IS PUT UP

III Chapter 1. Kulishovka

We were informed about other missions that were at Rostov area and brothers told us that effectively, there was a small town 70 km east called Kulishovka. They told us there was a Salvation Army family that was trying to start a mission, so we immediately went to visit them. It was a very young couple and what made me happy was when I found out they had a computer that typed Russian. Therefore we wrote a very well done application to present it to the authorities. The result would hopefully be that the authorities would allow us to put the tent up in the town.

The Salvation Army Captain felt very happy. Precisely during those days, Brother Andrei Jolakov who we had met in Moscow's Bert Clendennon bible school came to visit us. He spoke English so I asked him to revise and print the letter. So he did. Then we took it to the mayor's office where they told us that the decision was not to be taken by them but by the chief in Azov which is the largest city 10 kilometres east. So we wrote another request. They told us to wait a week until they had a committee meeting and decided how much we had to pay.

We waited and like always, they ignored our case, so we had to wait another week since the answer did not depend on only one person. After another week, on that same request, they wrote \$22,827.32 which was the amount to be paid in order for us to settle on the lot. They wanted \$10 for every square meter that we occupied. The big tent itself occupied 1500 square meters plus the smaller tents and vehicles.

In other words, they calculated according to what a business person would have to pay a day for a space in the market and multiplied it by 6 weeks which gave that result.

Then, we had to draw a map of how we were planning on organizing the lot.

I explained that we were not able to pay that amount because in the first place, we weren't selling anything nor were we charging and to please grant us an exception,--they asked me to explain all that in another request and to wait.

One of the most depressing things about Russia is that when a foreign person comes in, they think they have unlimited resources and everywhere we go, it's the same thing. Its as if a relationship is proportionally established to what one can give.

We waited and waited. Sometimes I wrote letters in the waiting rooms. Then, when they closed, I took naps around mid day in a foot ball field close by. I went back over and over again. Finally, after a few days, they gave us a 90% discount. So, we only had to pay \$2,282.73, however, it was still too much.

At the Bataisk factory, the tent poles were already finished, and they kept asking us when we would pick it up because they needed the space. The owner didn't say anything about it but I felt embarrassed. However, we didn't have a trailer to pick it up in.

At the end, one of the mayors in charge who I always spoke to told me,—"I will intercede for you--, I will talk to the committee--,come back on Friday and I will have an answer".

As Friday came along, I went to the office and asked the secretary to speak to him--.She told me he was very busy---, I explained that he was expecting me and it was urgent. After insisting, she let me through. When I entered the office he was fast walking from one side of the room to the other picking up papers. He looked at me and told me: "Ne poluchilos" (It didn't work). I answered: "Kak eto no poluchilos"? (What do you mean

it didn't work?) He answered in a harsher way: “Ne poluchilos, prieschaite sleduushioyo piatnizu”. (I was not able to do it, come back next Friday).

I felt worried because the permission for the Behemoth expired before that day (next Friday) and it was a problem to get it renewed. That was the only vehicle I had to get around with.

I woke up, we had our morning meeting, we prayed and though knew I was taking a great risk by taking a vehicle with a just expired permission I still intended to do just that. Just before entering Azov there is an obligatory stop where the police checks for documents of each vehicle.

I remembered a miracle written in “Gods Smuggler” by brother Andres about some bibles that he smuggled into Russian churches. He asked for nothing but a miracle praying in this manner—“Jesus, if you opened the eyes of the blind, I pray that the police don't find these Bibles”--and effectively, it happened--, the police didn't see the Bibles or didn't say anything about them if they did--. I thought, “now that I don't have another alternative, I will ask for the same miracle” and so we took off.

Approximately 20 kilometres before arriving to Azov, there is a big curve with a 40 kilometre per hour speed limit. “Behemoth” didn't have a speedometer; however I felt I was going slow. At the beginning of the curve there was a civil car parked, but that ended up being a police. He pulled me over and asked for the vehicles documents. I handed them to him and said no comments about them. He told me I was going over speed limit--. How fast was I going?---Faster than 40—

Okay, I'm sorry I said, and explained to him the situation---, he answered: “You have good Russian pronunciation; however, you still have to pay the ticket”. I paid and he gave me the receipt.

I didn't know what to think, I was expecting the worst now that I was getting closer to the check point. I only thought: God can find a way for them not to stop me. However, they did stop me and noticed that the permission was expired...then, they took me to the chief who saw the documents. I explained I only needed about two hours to go and come back to Azov, to please give me the permission because it was very important to the city for this tent to be put up---he was quiet for a moment then told me to go, to go on. I was amazed; however, the most important thing was still to come.

When I arrived to the mayor's office, the secretary was looking for a document. Then she handed me my request form with a new answer written on the corner. We were authorized to put up the tent “besplatno” (free).

I almost couldn't believe it! But it was true—I finally had the approval document in my hands. It was the beginning of a new year. I stopped to thank the police chief that did me that favour. He thanked me and we went straight to the factory to let Brother Victor now that everything was ready and asked him if he could take the structure for us in one of his trucks. He gladly agreed. During those days, a Danish brother came to help for a couple of weeks. His name is Soren and he was working in a mission in Israel but wanted to spend some time with us.

The next day, I brought the little camper where Laila and I lived. We put up the three central poles and two beams. The work was going slow and it worried me a lot if the tents measurements weren't correct since the tent was Italian, the structure and poles were Russian and the cranks were German. The big tent had been stored for more than 2 years and a fungus had started to grow on it which made the vinyl like gum. Then, the cranks we had ordered from Germany were orders from a catalogue. Other brothers had taken it to Ukraine and we picked it up at Kiev. These cranks had to hold the entire tents weight and also the structure had to also coincide. Theoretically, everything had to come out good, however, since elementary school; I learned that theory and practice don't always agree.

During our time in Russia, three of the front windows of different vehicles broke for different reasons, as in a spiritual fight. One of the windows was broken by soldiers. They demanded that we would take them to a certain place and the brothers who were there couldn't since they were doing guard. These soldiers had just come from the war in Chechenya. Then they threw a bottle at Behemoth breaking its front window. This is not counting the front windows broken on our way to Russia.

The next day, we went to Rostov to pick up Richard, a German brother that came to help for 10 days. We were then 7 brothers already.

That same day, we started to move the eight tent sections. Just to get them out of the truck, we needed 6 brothers. Then we laid them out one by one around the central poles. They came already numbered. Kieth Boyes gave me the distribution diagram. He is a brother from New Zealand that has served the Lord for many years in the Italian team.

As we were working, many young boys came to look and I told the teenagers that were watching to come over and help. They helped for a total of 10 seconds before they left. We laced the sections together, it began to get dark, and we began at a slow and simultaneous pace, turning the cranks. The tent began to rise, we were running from one spot to the other, checking everything and finally, at 1:00 a.m. the tent was on its feet!

How joyful!, What a victory!, Everything worked out!
It was a great joy!

Some brothers went to shower in an artificial lake that was close by. It was prohibited because it contained contaminated water. However for us, it didn't make a difference.

The next day, it was truly exciting to see the tent up. It looked so impressing. That same day, I called Clark and Norvell Olive to spread the news. Then, I went to the top of a building to take pictures. After having a good look at it I noticed there was some cords missing..."one, two..what happened?" I went back down and thought: They just stole our ropes". I counted one by one and, 17 out of the 88 were missing! I felt horrible. I couldn't believe it. Not even 24 hours had passed and they had already stolen some cords. It was impossible to find these types of ropes in Russia. Of course, we had the extras; however, we had to be more careful.

Another type of spiritual challenge began.

Teenagers wanted to have fun. They would get on the tent and run or sit on the benches as if it was a public park, everyone with their girlfriend.

During the meetings, they were not able to be still. I was surprised because its as if they didn't have any culture, sensibility that when there is a meeting going on, they need to pay attention to the band singing worship or the preacher giving the message. Things began to get out of control, but at the same time, it was a great opportunity to evangelize. We would talk to them by small groups; they listened for a while then made fun. Some that were there to steal gave the impression that they were listening; however, it was a trick to keep us distracted. Due to that, we were always watching out for the camp. Eventually some of them began to show respect.

The Salvation Army brothers always gave us a hand however; we got the most help from the Azov's Baptist church. Their youth, their choir, Pastor Pietr Ilich Burykin and another young couple always helped us out. Andrei and Irina Tachenko were regularly with us, helping us in any way.

It is so hard to come up with a definite conclusion when the experience itself is so new dealing with such indifferent and at the same time different people. There were many boys and girls that followed me and called me "diadia" (uncle). At times, I would take them to the market and buy each of them a banana. There was a very cute little girl named Rita that once told me: "Don't give any of those naughty kids anything", and talked very badly about them. The parents of one of the kids came along one day, they were extremely poor. So poor, they sometimes had no money to buy the bread for that day.

Everything we had was very attractive. Everyone wanted to see the bus, the camper, and tents. Once, at around 5pm I woke up after taking a nap. There where 5 kids outside looking through my window. As I went outside, a teenager yelled at me—Pedro, give me an apple! Trying to test me or catch my attention.

One way or another, the Gospel was always preached to them, especially around a personal conversation.

The teenagers could not understand why Richard was going back to Germany. We explained it was important to go all over the world and preach the gospel. Then they asked, “Then why go work in a rich country, if there is so much need of letting the world know about the danger there is in going to hell?” It was noticeable that these teenagers examined everything...so if we were going to convince them, we had to be consistent.

Sometimes they would misbehave. Even Andrei often told me: “Leave them alone!” Jesus said: “do not throw your pearls before swine”. He had his way of understanding this when it came to teenagers.

Perhaps, the best part of that campaign was that we celebrated Aliosha and Lioba's wedding.

Since the first days in Russia, I asked the team to not get involved into any serious relationship yet since it was not time for that. It was time to establish the work ahead of us.

Living as we did, in community, it is almost worthless to ask for these types of things. Every time there are men and women in a same place for that long of a time, there will eventually fall in love. So the unplanned happened. It was obvious that Aliosha spent more time with Lioba than usual. The next step was to call it to their attention and ask them to use discretion.

To be honest, being a leader of a ministry like this, it is very complicated to manage situations like this; I can't keep someone from getting married. It's a desire put by God in everyone's heart. If I was to oppose to that, then I would be opposing to God as well.

For many years, this has been a very controversial subject in the “Christ is the Answer” teams since so many restrictions are put. However, I must say that throughout the history of the team, around 200 or more couples have been formed from (1973 to 2003),

What I did tell Aliosha was that while we were putting up the tent, it was not time to think about marriage. I told him to leave it in God's hands for Him to take care of it. If it was God's will it will come to pass. But he reminded me of what I had said a year earlier concerning his relationship with Lioba, that when we get the tent up, we can consider them getting married. Now of course, I didn't think that the next day after putting the tent up...But Aliosha though I had told him that immediately after we put up the tent...

So we got together at the end of that same day and he said: “Ya budu terpet” (I will be patient), however he said it with anger. He accepted to obey, but felt deceived--, I told him to wait a second, as I thought about it I told him: “Ok, if you and Liuba can take over all the responsibilities to prepare a wedding---, then it will be okay with me. I can announce it to the group and celebrate a wedding. However, it's all on you. You must have the faith it takes.”

I don't know how, but before I announced it, the sisters in the team already knew everything. Weeks later, we celebrated one of the best wedding ceremonies, with an awesome dinner for 100 guests: Liuba's family from Ukraine, brothers of the Bataisk Pentecostal Church, Azov Baptist church, brothers of the Ukrainian group, brothers from Kulishovka Salvation Army, friends, and kids. It seemed like that day, the people of the town agreed to behave so we all enjoyed the poems and songs.

In times like these, it seems like Russians loose track of time and just enjoys the moment. Then with Aliosha and Lioba we drove to Azov to take pictures and Cossacks (Russians warrior people) escorted us all the way to Azov. A boat the passed by on the Don River stopped and gave them a ride. To be honest, I was impressed of how everything turned out. Everything seemed to effectively turn out appropriately.

III Chapter 2. Krasnodar

A week later, we had Pastor Hualov arrive during our morning body meetings. He introduced himself and asked to see the tent and carefully looked at it. It seemed to me that I had seen him before. He explained that he saw it from the freeway and it caught his attention. He knew about us and shared a moving story how that 300 kilometres south, in the city of Krasnodar, there was a huge congregation which was going through a very difficult situation. They didn't have a place to meet so they got together in a park. Before that, they gathered

in movie theatres, however; there had been bomb threats so the owners asked them to leave. For a time, they used a tent they had borrowed, however it was so old that it had already ripped in different places. After seeing our tent, he knew they needed one just like ours.

He told us that the brothers in Krasnodar were literally crying because they didn't have a place to gather..."well", he told me—"I understand that you all can't make a decision at this moment, however, I will bring the pastor and some deacons. Maybe you can work something out. Maybe you can lend or donate or tell us where you bought this tent".

The group did not like the idea. I didn't know what to think. It took us so much time and effort to finally get on our feet and now just to give it away already. I thought," Okay, the tent is not mine, it's the Lords. It is also the Russians church." We must learn to sacrifice first fruits to God. They needed it more than we did. Maybe after all, I could bring a tent just like ours from Italy the following year.

A few days later, while we were evangelizing in an old folks home in Azov, the Pastors came again we all went to have breakfast at our good friends Yura and Tania Streliane's home, who were always looking for ways to minister us, so there in their home we began to negotiate. Pastor Sergei Nakul was really supplicating us. He told me—to take our time to make the decision--, even though deep down, I had already taken a decision.

I told them that in Sicily there was a brother called Grazio Genovese that wanted to give us a big truck and trailer and that God willing, we would bring it to Russia the following year. Maybe we could bring a tent for them in the truck, however, they had to pay for it. They agreed even though situations turned out being managed slower than we thought which led to different obstacles. We lent them our tent for the winter, and eventually we were able to bring them a new big tent. It arrived to the Krasnodar Park in the truck where the new tent was put up and Bethania church gave us ours back.

Maybe some day God will allow me to write a book on how that second trip went as we met with completely new obstacles. Austria didn't allow us to go through as the truck was too old. It was also not authorized to bring over that type of cargo. The tent was not registered with the same company as the truck. If the "Guardia di Finanza Italiana" (Italian finance guard) would have stopped us, they would have confiscated everything. I was thinking about what I would say if they would question me. I wanted to tell the Italian authorities—what do you prefer...that this tent arrives in Russia for the Gospel to be preached or for the Russians to come here and live in your pack yard?

Someone told me that if I said that, I would get arrested since it is considered disrespect towards the authorities.

When we arrived to the border of German with Poland, there were around 20 offices that helped accelerate the crossing process. I went to each and one of them and no one wanted to take the responsibility. We were no longer at the authorities' level.

Already frustrated, I went to the central office on the Polish side where a young man was responsible. He told me: "Bring the bum bum over", making some words of motor sound with his mouth. I thought, "how are we going to bring it all the way here?" The Germans would have to return the documents which Laila had given them to begin the process.

I went back to the truck and told Laila to figure some way out where we could get our documents back. There was a long line and Laila just jumped in the front to get the documents back. We got on the truck and started our way through but we bumped into the impossible. A German cop started yelling at Laila like a furious dictator telling her—that in order to get through; we must have all the required stamps. Another man that was there that had mercy on us took our documents and went into his office, after a few minutes we had all our documents in order, however we still couldn't get through to Poland, we could only go back to Germany. He explained to us that 30km ahead there was another border where they would be more tolerant.

I thought it was strange. How can laws change from one border to another if it's still the same country?

However, we had no other choice.

There was another problem. Arnold, our Salvadorian brother could not enter Germany again since he had been already 3 months there and his Polish transit visa was only for 5 days and was expiring the next day. They could arrest him, so at the control spot, when we gave them our passports to go back to Germany--, they held Arnold's passport back and told us we had to wait.

After a few minutes, an official was headed towards me with a serious and at the same time smirk look on his face. He gave us the passport and officially greeted us back into Germany.

So then we turned around and went north to the next border. About 5 km before arriving, there was a gas station that served fast food. I thought it would be a good idea to stop and have a good pizza for breakfast since it was already late and we hadn't eaten anything.

While we were standing around a table at the gas station eating pizza, a couple of German cops arrived and looked at us strangely. They ordered pizza and began to eat right beside us. We kindly greeted them and about an hour later, we were arriving to the next border.

It was a huge parking lot where we would have to wait until the next day. We could hear polish and Russian voices joking and discussing while cooking on their gas kitchens in the dark.

The next morning we began all the paper work. This time there was not much bureaucracy on the German side. Everything seemed nice and calm on the Polish side. We were still concerned about Arnold's visa that was expiring; however, there was no major problem. The man that did the paperwork for us had taken a little of liquor. He wanted to be friendly with us. He took me to the boss who he had a funny expression on his face when he saw the documents. He asked me if I had 20 thousand dollars in cash, which they would return at the other side of Poland. This was their guarantee that we wouldn't go sell the tent in Poland.

I told him: "Who would travel with that amount of money in places like this?"—to which he answered—"In Poland we have a saying, If you don't have money to travel, then just stay home".

His tone of voice indicated me that he was not against us...and continued—you will have to be escorted from one border to another to make sure you will not leave that tent in our territory.

I answered—"whatever you say"--. He continued...you will not be able to travel today (the whole day went to paper work) because there are "Banditi" on the road. You understand "Banditi?"---"yes I understand". "You will have to park on the other side for tonight. I will get your documents ready tonight and tomorrow by 8:00 a.m. the guard who will escort you will be ready. The trip will take 24 hours. Don't offer any food to the guard because he can fall asleep and then, problems will begin"--. "Okay" I said.

That moment, thunder, lightning and heavy rain began. A type of thunder that scares, however, we felt peace and victory. For us, it was as if the heavens were celebrating with us.

As we drove through those wheat fields, I thought of all the suffering the people there went through for generations. However, Poland has the first place in the world for assisting church. Supposedly, the Polish people are very religious.

During our short stay there, I unintentionally learned a bad word since the guard the travelled with us said it every time there was a check point.

Sometimes it's sad to go through places and not leave trace. That's why; I suggest that if you are a Christian, tell at least one person in that country "God loves you". That can decide their eternal life and the trip will not be in vain.

In our entrance to Byelorussia, we had to leave our driver Pino Sanzi again, because he didn't have a visa. We had to quickly find someone that was willing to drive the bus through. The Byelorussian police told me to

drive it myself but I said no because my drivers license didn't allow it. They told me: "It doesn't matter, we won't stop you"--, "No!" I told them "I don't want to get in an accident".

We had hundreds of trucks behind us in line and we had to do something fast. Talking with the other truckers around us we found a driver that was willing to help. He drove the big truck all the way to where the vehicles are parked and all documents are done in order to enter Byelorussia and Russia which is in Brest, around 15 kilometres ahead.

We ended up staying there for three weeks until Seriosha and Liosha arrived in the Lemon. They travelled around 4500 kilometres from Bataisk. We met many brothers in Brest, as we asked for permission to leave the fenced in parking area and spend Sundays with them, the brothers there were also Messianic Jews (Christians). We had an unbelievable time.

Now we will skip a long while; from 1999 to 2001. We put up our tent at Krasnodar, Kropotkin, and Gulkevichi throughout year 2000, and in 2001 at Azov. Here is a brief history of what happened in Azov and the consequences of such events.

Part IV

OUR LAST EVANGELICAL CAMPAIGN

IV Chapter 1. Azov

The lord opened doors to spend our winter in the city of Tixaretsk which is in the Krasnodar region. It was a big house that used to belong to a Baptist family but they had immigrated to the United States. There was enough space in the parking lot for almost all the vehicles where we would also be able to work on them.

I believe that this place was sent by God, thanks to the faith that brother Aliosha had. Before winter started, we had put up a campaign in Kropotkin. Laila and I had left Russia for the umpteenth time because our visas were expiring and we had to leave to process a new one. This time we went to Stockholm, Sweden.

Since we found ourselves in a spiritual battle it was no surprise that we were running into many obstacles and this time was no exception. We were not able to get our visa at the Russian Embassy unless we presented a HIV/aids test. It was a new enforced law which took time and money. However, before the snow melted, we were back in Russia.

Another complication was that I got bronchitis, the worst one I ever had. I could hardly talk and I was weak. I asked myself, why has God paralyzed me? I saw how the group would regularly visit schools, rehab centres and churches and I had to stay in bed.

To make things worse, I new my dad was very sick, almost to the point of death. My sisters in California would call me and tell me I had to go back to El Salvador to assist my father and be with my mother.

Moments like this is when I would like to be able to hear Gods voice to know what direction to take, and the more we ask God to indicate what to do, the more silent the heavens seem. In moments like this, we would like a manual; a guide to know what to do, however, they don't exist.

I have read literature of contemporary authors that write that God showed them, that God told them in a clear manner which makes me question myself, "why doesn't He talk to me?" I also ask my self if maybe it's the voice of their imagination that they heard and say it was Gods voice.

I lean more towards C.S. Lewis, the author of "A diary of pain"--, the more he called on God begging him for an explanation for the death of the woman he loved, he still found the heaven quiet. There was no way to find an answer, however it was precisely in those moments when God was transforming his atheistic heart into one

of best known Christian writers of the past generation.

God remained silent upon my concern, which I believe is when we start to believe in faith. I give testimony to that not only in those circumstances, but in many more like in which you reader, will find ahead the answer. So after not hearing any special word of heaven, I decided to leave for El Salvador leaving Laila behind and Aliosha was in charge. I had to trust in God that he would identify himself with them and with me.

I asked Andrei, (the team's mechanic) to accompany me to the Moscow train station and to wait there until I got on the plane. Besides, I needed a new passport. Theoretically, everything had to be ready at the French embassy at Moscow and it was. My Russian visa had a longer duration than my passport so since the number on the old passport was the one on the visa, I had to travel with both passports to not have problems going or coming back.

While in Moscow I started to get better from my severe bronchitis, maybe it was a miracle. Laila had fasted several days as she got really worried to see me so sick. We stayed at a Bible school in Moscow, which during a period of time, served as a type of hotel for brothers that immigrated to the States or to Germany. Since communism fell apart, hundreds of Christians in the interior of the Soviet Union requested immigration papers at the American Embassy in Moscow. After careful investigations, they granted facilities to many of these brothers.

The director of this institution was photographed with president Putin and Alexei II (The Russian orthodox Patriarch), considered to the Russian Orthodox what the Pope means to the Catholics.

We went to visit him in his office and like always, he very kindly received us, as we had gotten to know each other already in Bataisk. Then I had the courage to ask him to communicate me with Alexis II and have him communicate to the Orthodox Bishop of the Krasnodar region with the goal that they would not be against us as we were trying to get the permission to put up the tent.

The team was trying to get a permit to put up the tent in Tijaretsk. The Mayor told us that they could not authorize it unless an Orthodox priest of Tijaretsk agreed to it, and the Priest in his turn said that he couldn't do anything unless his immediate spiritual authority approved of it. It was an ongoing circle. It was months of visits, requests, phone calls, and everything was in vain. Of course, there were lots of prayers and fasting, but nothing worked out.

One of the priests gave me a strange impression. He was young and had a long beard. He was dressed with a long black tunic and a cross hanging from his neck. There was a religious spirit in him, like a person really focused on his mystical Orthodox believe, and he was practically unreachable. Sure of himself in his territory, and without a bit of tolerance he showed a hermetic attitude like "there is nothing to discuss".

I thought while in Moscow, as I'm here I will intercede with the boss. While I was speaking, Andrei and the Director of the Bible school started to laugh. I didn't understand why and then they explained to me—"I cant do it, Alexis has died"—"What do you mean he died?"---"Yes, a long time ago, they killed him and his entire family".

So Andrei explained to me that I had made a mistake with my primitive Russian, I was mentioning the last Tsar Alexander and not the Patriarch. Of course he understood, but he didn't want to get Involved In this difficult situation, and as a result, the group couldn't get the permission to put the tent up in Tijaretsk.

Years back, my wife Laila once told me--,"Russians don't like that American spirit", that want fast results of their work. Those people have suffered great humiliations and persecutions, and we can't come here and be bossy. We must learn to be patient. That I understand, but I also understand that if we want the gospel to be spread, we must give hundreds of steps of faith, which involve some risks.

My dear friend and brother, Richard Wuellner, once told me: The reason why they can't do anything to stop terrorism Is because terrorist have anything to defend. This would be a good subject to preach about, and I believe that as Christians, we should be more radical in our contending for the faith, but not in the natural of

course but the spiritual battle, and not just defend our material interests.

Anyways, with credit cards and ATM cashiers I was able to pay my flight to El Salvador. Andrei told me—“You will get on the plane and forget about us and Russia. Remember that Jesus didn’t let that one who wanted to follow him to go and bury his father”. This was my goodbye.

IV Chapter 2. Andrei

If you want to meet someone with reduced spirituality, you must meet Andrei. I asked him to come with me to Moscow, precisely for that as everyone else in the team had lost patience with him and considered that there was no longer any hope for him. He loved it when I gave him money, lots of it, and I had to give it to him because he had a passion to maintain the vehicles working. We worked from 6 a.m. until 11 p.m. even in below zero temperatures. I think sometimes, he wanted to cover his conscience with work.

He had another unforgivable defect which was that he couldn’t quit smoking. He secretly did it and was greatly ashamed about it, but he couldn’t stop. I didn’t want to tell him to leave the team because he was an unstoppable worker.

I met his mother, a small and petite woman. She lived alone and in great poverty. She used to pick apples and other fruits and conserved many things in glass bottles to have something to eat during the winter. I also met his sister. A very sad girl, who ended up committing suicide, while we spent our winter in Goriachi Kluch.

Genadi Alexeivich asked me to send Andrei to his home to be with his mother during that time. Brother Genadi was the administrator for Bethania Church, a very intelligent and practical man for whom I hold lots of respect. Andrei also asked me for some help economically. I don’t remember how much I sent him, however that amount stayed in his mind that I had many resources and because of that, later on, he said he had two jobs. First, convince me that he needed money, because if I didn’t give him any, our vehicles would get ruined during the next move; second, to repair the vehicles.

He then had an unending list of things to do. Whenever he saw a towed car, he insisted to buy it and with a small amount of money, he could fix them and keep them for the teams use. He also loved to buy “toys” or “Stickers” to decorate the vehicles—special soap to wash our cars, glitter, anything to make our vehicles look shiny. This made Aliosha very mad who insisted that we would no longer allow Andrei to do what he was doing. Personally, it didn’t really bother me because I could see the main jobs getting done.

I have had several bad experiences with vehicles during the years. I was in El Paso Texas in the U.S.A. It was in the year of 1984 and I was driving down the freeway when my brakes went out. Thank God I wasn’t going too fast and I was able to stop. Then in 1986 In Monterrey, Mexico, it was during a move where we had to go through a mountain area and the motor of my bus overheated and cracked. The bus had to be towed and the motor had to get fixed. It also happened twice in El Salvador. The year 1998, leaving El Congo going towards San Juan Opico, the brakes went out while I was driving downhill. Again I was able to stop the bus with no greater incidents.

Living in community, where several people drive the same vehicles, it is almost impossible to keep them in good conditions. Most of our vehicles would of never been allowed to been driven in Europe since they are too old. That’s why I liked the idea of having someone that took good care of our vehicles. I felt more like being on Andrei’s side however at the same time; it was causing an internal division in the team.

I tried everything to straighten him out. I sent him to evangelize with another brother in order for him to develop a vision of why we are in the mission field. However, he always came back as soon as he left. In a few words, I didn’t want to loose such a good worker and I put my trust in God that Andrei would change.

A month later, I arrived to the same airport, Cheremitevo II, there I found; Laila, Ruth Noemi (Salvadorian), Snezhana (Ukrainian) and Andrei (Russian), and we stayed at the same place we did before.

IV Chapter 3. Return to Azov

Ruth Noemi was there because her visa was about to expire and had to leave Russia in order to renew it. Laila thought about taking her to Sweden and Snezhana suggested to take her to Ukraine. As it tends to happen, they give us instructions to do certain things, once you do it they say: *Vi ne pravilno delali.* (You did it the wrong way).

I gave Ruth two alternatives: Either she goes to El Salvador and with faith gets another visa in Nicaragua, or stay illegally in Russia until we all had to leave: Arnold, Laila, and me. She chose the second alternative, which was the best.

When we bought the train tickets from Moscow to Azov, we forgot to request a train ticket that didn't go through Ukraine since none of us had visas for Ukraine. Our final destiny was in the south of Russia. I thought it wouldn't be a problem, besides, we had asked God for His help. By faith, nothing was going to happen.

Actually, in the Moscow station, we told the lady that watched our wagon. Every wagon had a woman who was in charge of taking care for the passengers; from pyjamas to hot water for tea. We explained the situation and when she understood she said: "Gospod dast" (God shall provide). However, it was not like that. When we entered the Ukrainian territory, police men entered our wagon, found out about our situation and threw us and our luggage out of the train. They made us fill out very long paperwork as we sat there almost the whole night and then they told us to go back to Russia in the next train. They said that we could go back with that same ticket. But it wasn't so, as we had to pay another train ticket back.

My geographical knowledge was not enough to know where we were or where to go through to go around Ukraine on the Russian side. Andrei, who was there to help didn't know either, so we had to ask.

I thought it was close so I asked a taxi to take us. He got frightened! He knew very well his geography and knew it was hundreds of kilometres away. The same thing happened with all the other taxi drivers. No driver was willing to take us and even if they were, it would have been very expensive.

At 4 a.m. they told us that a train was coming by and would take us. After waiting a long while, I went to take a long walk and breathe some fresh air. I leaned against a wall and right away a police man was there asking for my documents. He thought I was a Chechen terrorist. He took me into a small room where they asked me many questions and had to show all my documents again.

Okay, we left and to make a long story short, an 18 hour trip took us three days. Around 1400 kilometres from north to south.

Finally we arrived to Azov where I saw all of our vehicles parked in a beautiful park which made me very happy to see and it was where we would have our next tent campaign.

It was June 17, 2001.

The next day (June 18), a group of young men came to help us put up the tent. They came from a drug rehabilitation centre. That same day, they put up the three central poles and its beams. I was very thankful, first of all to God, then with Aliosha who had taken responsibility to find such a beautiful lot while I was gone.

A local sister had done the request to the Mayor, who approved of it since the situation with the drug addicts was severe. She was Tatiana Sergeevna; founder of the Christian moral institution called "Mothers against narcotics". In Russia the drug scene is very complicated. The young drug addicts are completely out of control and many times sold the furniture of their own homes, threatened their mothers asking for money or even demanding their mothers to sell the apartment. Many died a premature death and there was no interest in helping the relatives and poor mothers as they would bury them.

The Mayor was willing to do anything in order to see a change in the city. Days later, when everything was getting a little rough, the Vice Mayor came to visit during one of our body meetings and he said that the only solution for the drug addicts was to hire a “killer”.

So there we are, the camp started rising little by little; tent after tent. Electricity wasn't put until July 4th, so we had 17 meetings without sound system. The heat was suffocating, and for the first time, around 150 people gathered for the meetings.

It was the first time in the history of Azov that something like this happened. We didn't know that earlier attempts to evangelize in Azov had been stopped with violence by the Cossacks. Now they were upset and began to threaten us to make us leave or they would destroy whatever we had there. They wrote several articles in the newspapers saying we weren't allowing their ancestors to rest in peace since actually the place for our camp was a cemetery 200 years ago.

They said we had very loud disco music, when in reality we didn't even have a sound system and we played the acoustic guitar. They wanted to force the Mayor to kick us out and accused him of trading the country since we were foreigners and were preaching a religion against their holy autochthonous traditions. They laughed at us, distorting the truth, it got to such point that news reporters and local TV channels came to interview us. This was truly a great opportunity to preach, give out testimonies and express our feelings.

An interviewer asked me

--if I wouldn't be sad if they destroyed everything

--I answered that of course, it would be very sad, then she told me

--How will you react if they come?

--I answered: Like Jesus taught us “We are to turn the other cheek” We will not get offended nor are we going to take reprisal.

The news reporters for the TV were objective and did us justice.

I remember there was a sister that was a professional hairstylist and offered to cut the hair of each and everyone of us in the team. This was her way of helping out. As she started cutting my hair as the TV reporters arrived and started taking videos and that is how the report began; telling my story while she cut my hair. They also took videos of the team practicing a drama, Laila singing and several other brothers and sisters interviews.

For three consecutive nights, after every meeting, we asked everyone that attended to sign a request in order for us to be able to stay. It was around 300 that signed; which shows that we had won the towns favour. I felt so calm about it because this same thing had already happened in Italy, Mexico and El Salvador.

IV Chapter 4. Dealing with the religious Authorities

As days went by, journalists continued to come. People told me to stop trusting them since they always changed the truth around. So then I decided that before I answered any questions, I would ask for their full name, phone number, address, where they worked and I also took a picture of them. They always seemed to like the idea of me taking pictures of them.

I remember one that always insisted that what I did was against the rules; against the established laws because if we wanted to preach the Gospel, we had to be under the authority of the Orthodox Church which was recognized by the state of Russia.

I tried to explain that when God does something new, He moves outside of the established religious structures. For example, when John the Baptist began to preach in the Jordan River, it was something never seen before which made the authorities curious since they didn't exactly know what was going, so they wanted to have all the information concerning the Baptizer.

The journalist that was interviewing me didn't seem to digest that idea very well since he was still convinced that things should be done according to the laws. It was like speaking to an impenetrable statue. If I said

something, he used it against us. I made the mistake of giving him a document as he said he wanted a photocopy of. It was an original document proving my identity in Russia. He never gave it back. I felt in him a satanic stubborn presence. Several brothers would listen to our conversation through a thin wall and worried about the consequences of that interview.

An hour later, a Schigulé vehicle with a chauffeur and a priest entered the camp. Like always, the priest had a long beard and a long black tunic. He got out of the vehicle and went around camp without greeting anyone. He entered my little tent that was used as an office and took the journalist and left.

Brothers told me that there was no reason to talk to people like him because they were going to cause problems. I thought that they couldn't do anything against us, God wouldn't allow it. The truth was that due to my small amount of knowledge about Orthodox believers, I was a too naïve.

Still today, I'm admired by the skill that a man had in order to fool me, exactly like a wolf covered in sheep's wool.

I think that through that interview, a discredit campaign started. A few weeks later when this journalist began to publicize his reports, we were already leaving. He then showed up again with haughty attitude instead of feeling sorry for all the damage he caused us. This time though, Pastor Pietr Ilich Burykin was there with me, he was the Pastor of the Baptist Church in Azov and he had really helped us out throughout our time there. I thought that the Pastor and the journalist would be able to communicate better. However; I was wrong because light and darkness can not get along.

IV Chapter 5. A lawyer wants to help

Two days before our tent was demolished, there was another very significant guest. The superintendent of the Pentecostal Evangelical churches in the region of Rostov came to visit along with a lawyer who was a new believer.

This lawyer explained that because of our lack of experience in Russia, we sometimes got ourselves into problems, which complicated the situations and consequently, he was willing to help in those important aspects such as registrations and inspections for each of our vehicles, which usually takes a lot of money and time. He also wanted to help with the permissions for lots and visas for any foreigner who was part of the group.

I could write books about how complicated each of these situations were.

In reality, I felt glad because finally a serious Christian institution would take charge for that since each of us that had any type of responsibility of this kind found ourselves under continuous frustration.

I thought: if all this was only true. These men talked with so much security about dealing with all these types' of problems. They knew the laws, the mentality, the thoughts of the authorities, and we wouldn't have to boil our brains with the requests nor stand in long lines, infinite waits, offices, attend appointments when the person we needed to speak to wasn't even there. The only thing we had to worry about was about being in charge of the spiritual things—preaching, teaching, singing, and resting.

It is worth telling what the comments of the team members were: Aliosha told me: "They don't understand that this is a spiritual battle and that we must be spiritually equipped, not intellectually. Here who has authority will change positions depending on its convenience; this is not going to result".

The one I found the funniest was the comment that Sasha, a 40 years old brother whose features reminded me of my fathers when he was young. Sasha was married and had two teenage kids. Alcohol and drugs made him lose his family; however he had gotten saved had an authentic change. He was also an unstoppable worker.

It was prohibited to dig holes in that lot since it was a public park. So in the tent that was used as our shower, he had dug a perfect rectangular whole. He covered it with wood boards and covered them with the grass that

way; no one could see the whole neither that the water coming from the shower was underneath. Then, all the dirt that he dug out was placed in big blue plastic bags which were used to store the tents sections. The whole was perfectly covered with no trace whatsoever.

Sasha told me with that simple characteristic gestures-- Have you read "Dead souls" by Gogol? No I answered "why?"-- Because that lawyer reminded me of the main character in that book. --What do they have in common? -- Well, he said, that things didn't turn out like he wanted them to and I have a feeling it will be the same with this man.

The sisters also had those negative comments and feared that I would put too much trust into this man because he said he would have to say he was the director of the mission. That he would take charge over everything and all we had to do was to rest and dedicate ourselves to the spiritual part.

I have always thought that it is best to give a person a chance to prove their theories in a practical way. If someone has the solution to a hard problem, say: "it is in your hands, prove it to me and let me see what you can do".

Of course, I wasn't going to hand him the entire responsibility but I thought that if he came with the superintendent of the region and recommended by the same, there must be some credibility.

IV Chapter 6. Returning from Sunday meetings

Every Sunday, we split into groups and visit several churches. I usually went to Bataisk, on Frunzi road because it was the first church that received us and I had great respect and love towards the Pastor.

When we came back, around midday, someone from the Gazelle (the minibus) noticed that the roof by the kitchen bus was missing. I thought it was strange because on Sundays no one in the team worked and hardly no one had stayed in camp, then we noticed the big tent was missing, then we asked ourselves:--"Where is it?—What happened?"

It was on the ground, and very strangely folded so I asked: "Why did Aliosha put the tent down if he knows we still don't have a place to go and without my permission?"

I saw him; he was speaking with the chief of Police. I didn't want to get near since I was a foreigner and theoretically I was only a guest invited by the church.

After I looked at the situation better, I noticed the tent wasn't put down. It was bulged down including the central structure. The lights and some benches were broken and everything was on the floor. The central structure, the three main poles and two huge steel bridges were bent as they had landed on the ground.

Then I understood that the entire camp was that way. The tents that covered our campers were pulled to the side, stakes thrown everywhere, the benches were carelessly stacked and the small tents were on the ground.

Approximately 300 elderly woman and some Orthodox priests, like always dressed in black, had come. They and untied all the ropes around the big tent. Cossacks were all around watching that no body interrupted their "work", and at the same time, all those people were singing orthodox hymns. The priest assured them that God was pleased with what they were doing.

Incidentally, the Mayor drove by and saw what was going on. The police couldn't control them. They disappeared immediately.

Aliosha took out the camera and tried taking pictures during the destruction. A Cossack came along and kicked him near his private parts. Aliosha didn't get hurt but the Cossack did take the camera and took out the film.

Minutes later, we arrived. We were under "shock". We couldn't believe it. What to do? Okay, begin to put it all in order, unlace the tent sections, extend them and carefully fold them. Begin to assemble the benches

again. Do everything calmly like if nothing had ever happened. I felt as if it was just one more move like any other. It was like we didn't care what they had done since we were concentrated in organizing everything again.

We had breakfast, rested, and I got the idea to put up a small tent for the meeting that night. There we would put the sound system and the benches, and that evening while it still was not so dark (it starts to get dark at 10:30 p.m.) we had a meeting. An invited music group was playing that night and the Lord was glorified.

Of course, due to the sorrow, the way we put up the small meeting tent was not so nice. We did it in a hurry, and Liosha had the idea to arrange it better. We lifted the long side of the tent and arranged it like a stage and put the benches outside in front of the tent. Then, the next day, we reorganized the camp. The sun was still up at 8:30 p.m. and it was hot, however; people still sat on the benches and listened.

Again, TV reporters showed up and there were lots to talk about for what had just happened. The police told us that they were never able to control the Cossacks. That was a long story because the Cossacks had lived a kind of anarchy since time of the Tsars, who in order to keep them busy, told them to defend Russia against Turkish invaders.

During communism, the Cossack still held to the orthodox religious spirit, even if it was in secret. They call themselves "Gods worriers, defenders of the faith". It might remind you a little of what the Spanish did during the crusades.

Our "new Director" said he would be in charge of everything, in order to seek justice. He went to speak with the authorities, it seemed that they told him that the City Attorney never agreed to us putting the tent up in the first place and that the Mayor was not authorized to give us the permission and that the request was not done correctly. From his point of view, we would be the transgressors along with Sister Tatiana Sergeevna, director of "Mothers against Narcotics".

I'm sorry to say this but this man who said he would be our "New Director", was never a help. Whenever he told us not to worry, next thing we knew, something worse had happened. He was going to get an extension of visas for Arnoldo and Ruth, our two Salvadorians, but he just kept their documents indefinitely, which led to many trips back and forth to Rostov.

My comment is that many times it happens that those who don't know about spiritual struggles want to win the battle with logic and intellect but in the end things don't work out.

Truthfully, similar situations occur in Dostoyevsky's books where everyone thinks to be right from their own point of view. Then the discussions are clarified and nothing works out for them.

So our "new Director" told us again—"Don't worry, rest assured that this will turn out well".

That night, at around 1:30 a.m., the neo-Nazis came to the camp to badge Nazi signs on our vehicles. The brother that was doing night guard tried to stop them, but it was impossible. As soon as they left, the guard started cleaning the vehicles and tents with thinner.

The police arrived again and took a detailed report. But no one did anything.

The chief told us to leave because we were getting exposed to danger. The main reason why we didn't leave was because we had no where to go. Everyday, different brothers would go visit small towns around 100, 200 or even 300 km away and always came back with the same answer: Kategoricheski Net! (This means: Categorically No!)

The strange thing was that Brothers and Sisters from other towns would occasionally come to invite us to their towns. They were brothers who had begun Christian rehab centres or similar works. They said they really wanted us to go visit them with the tent. They said they were familiar with the government and Mayors

and knew how to get permission. They were full of enthusiasm and faith. I ask myself, what kind of faith? Since after knocking on doors, the answer was always "No".

IV Chapter 7. How to deal with an ex drug addict team?

The doors were closed everywhere we went. We had nowhere to go. What to do with a group of 20 or more people? Sister Liuba had recently given birth and was about to leave the hospital. Sometimes I thought that God was against us or that maybe there was sin in the team and that's why God didn't bless us.

There were several things that complicated the situation. I felt that many Christians around us, instead of having a helping attitude, were there to get benefit out of the situations. Several times a day they came and asked us to help them transport something or someone in our vehicles. It got to the point that I had to tell them we weren't a free taxi.

Then, some drug addicts wanted to join the team in order to get away from drugs. I mean, it wasn't to serve. I made the mistake to believe in their sincerity and accept them in the team hoping they would change and maintain them spiritual with a continuous evangelizing program. But it wasn't like that.

They drugged up and gave each other the fault which created a depressing atmosphere. These people are desperate to change and have nowhere to go; begging for a chance. They said they were willing to do anything as long as they were accepted. Being that I never was a drug addict, I believed their stories and I don't have any experience how to deal with this, not knowing how strong the temptation can be for them. Also, I later understood that a drug addict can't be under grace but must be subject to restrictions.

Seeing that time went by and a new lot wasn't found made me worry because in a few months; Arnold, Ruth, Laila and I would have to leave Russia. I also feared that this would end as a big loss. That the fact of being stuck in one place and not being able to hold meetings, would favour sin. I knew the team wasn't ready for this kind of challenge. We were about to lose it all.

I couldn't understand why the beginning of an investment for God's Kingdom would end with failure. I had preached so many times about the parable of the talents and about the mines... For every investment, there is profit, there is nothing else to lose, however, evidence showed the opposite.

There was a division going on in the team that affected everyone. It was as if the devil had gotten his way. I was searching the Lord for His guidance. I was looking for a way to punish a brother that was caught smoking and I seemed to get an answer for this. Besides washing dishes, cleaning the restrooms and cleaning the brother's shoes before Sunday church meetings he had to wash the brothers' feet. I was amazed by how well he took the punishment and did what he had to do and still didn't leave. As you might guess, it was Andrei again, only that now we had another new believer, ex drug addict, who also was a mechanic and his name also was Andrei. The two Andreis were working hard with the vehicles maintenance and felt I respect for that and I also prayed for them.

While I write this, after a year, it still makes me sad to know that some of them didn't stay in the Lord's ways.

But, what was the saddest story in this time was that some churches wanted to borrow the big tent for a conference in Succo, a very small town at the edge of the Black Sea.

Some of the best known leaders and pastors were going to be present. I left the tent with the condition that it would be used to gain souls and not to give credit or fame to personalities and that we would lend it if there was permission for us to have a lot in that region.

They agreed. However, as time went by, a new lot for us never came along. They wanted the tent anyways so I felt obligated to lend it to them.

Of course, Laila, another brother and I went on "the Lemon" to hand over the tent. However, no one came out to receive us, nor did they invite us to participate or offer to help us with all the expenses we had had in order

to repair the tent and the structure.

Sure, the place by the Black Sea was beautiful, but it was hard to just sit there and enjoy it since by then, the team was already out of the lot in Azov, where we were already illegal since two weeks. So then, we had to set up just outside of Azov, right next to the factory of a brother.

There we lived for a month as if we were refugees. We were like outcasts and transgressors while the by the Black Sea in Succo the great conference was in process.

Did they care? I suppose they didn't. I think they didn't even notice.

Did I feel upset?—No, not at all. I actually felt the strong presence of God. I had time to carefully read the Scriptures. I would go for long walks to big field.

During those days, the Manhattan twin towers were attacked and it was hard to believe and we thought that war would start, however we felt peace in our hearts and we saw life under a total different perspective.

IV Chapter 8. Our visas expired

What to do? There was not much that we could do. Someone said: "To travel is to die a little". I don't know exactly what that person was referring to, but I feel that when we're going to travel, it's as if we must remove our roots. I feel like I can't get involved too into anything because I will soon have to face different problems somewhere else.

Our visas were expiring and we had to make a plan. To leave the team in those conditions really hurt me. I had mentioned to new people or the ones who didn't behave well that they had to leave and come back next year when we could find a place to put the tent up. I never imagined that we would not be allowed back.

It's like if sailing with no wind. Everything was going wrong. I felt like I had lost the battle. It wasn't about a decisive battle neither about a final battle. Nevertheless, I knew that God could change around the circumstances if it was His will. We only needed to continue having faith, trusting in His promises.

We purchased 4 tickets to travel from Rostov to Moscow, about 1400 kilometres. I asked both Andreis, one the official mechanic and the other the mechanics helper to accompany us to the Rostov station. I left everything in Aliosha's hands; he would be the one to make all the decisions. At the same time I felt bad because I knew I was putting too much responsibility in his hands.

I had my "Banco Uno" (Bank One) debit card from where he could take out money at the ATM cashiers as long as there were funds.

When we arrived to the Rostov train station a police stopped us to investigate us as we were entering the train station territory. They investigated the two Andreis, they hand cuffed one of them and took him into a room. I explained that we were from a Christian mission.

We were all frightened! The police told me—"this man is not a Christian". First, he is under provisional liberty; second of all, he has dry marihuana particles between his teeth. Then I understood. All throughout Russia, marihuana grows as weeds. No one pays any attention to it because it is impossible to get rid of it but for those who know the effect, they cut it, dry it out, and either chew it or smoke it.

Days before, Aliosha found small packets of dry marihuana thrown around the old building next to where the camp was set up. He showed it to me and confronted the team about it, however; no one said anything about it.

The team's mechanics worked in the back part of the camp since it was a perfect place to repair cars, like a real mechanic place where they could work comfortable. Our camper where we slept was also there. One night, we heard a wolf or maybe a neighbour's dog that barked in a very strange way.

My thoughts were that if God doesn't reveal to me who it was, there is nothing we could do about it. Of course, there was always a group that prayed: God, purify this group. Reveal the hidden sins. Bring

everything to the light so you can bless us again.

This time, things did come to light. They searched us one by one. I was worried because it was only a few minutes until the train would take off. Andrei stayed in prison. They were asking for \$1000 fine; however, I didn't have the money. Andrei Schilia (the other mechanic) had the keys to the vehicle, and he suggested that we just would go to an ATM cashier (we still had time). I answered—I cannot do this to Arnold, Ruth and Laila and just and spend all the money we have?

It was one of those fast and hard decisions to make. This time I had no mercy.

Whenever we arrived to Moscow I would have to buy 4 two-way tickets from Moscow to Rome and pay \$150 for each for new visas plus trip expenses from Rome to Naples where the team was.

I told him I was not going to pay it. I was out of patience.

I will let the reader to come up with their own conclusions. But what happened was the Andrei's parents (the one who got arrested) who are very dear people and loved their son very much, begged Aliosha to help them get Andrei out of jail. So he ended up lending them \$900. They promised to pay back; however I'm not sure if they did.

For a long time, we went through many similar situations in Russia. Brothers and pastors regularly came to ask for money instead of helping our ministry out.

To covet the things or money of your neighbour, was apparently was not wrong for them. They wanted our tent, vehicles, benches, and sound system. Especially the "charismatic" churches who believe in prosperity and they were the ones who came and asked the most.

We lived under continual pressure which caused us sadness over and over. I would help and end up loosing. Sometimes I think that this can be one of the reasons why God didn't allow us to go back.

I must admit, I didn't know how to react. As a Christian, that opportunistic spirit made me sad, even in the members who wanted to take vehicles or get money. And I ask myself: As long as it doesn't get treated with the opposite attitudes of the Christian principles, how will God bless Russia?

Their leaders have lots of work ahead of them and I believe they must start by putting the example. There are hundreds of testimonies that manifest the same principal. There are brothers with opportunistic principles that prosper and God lets them move on in their projects; while others, are happy with what they have and still aren't able to prosper.

The decisive battle has not yet arrived. I hope to one day go back to Russia and see the fruit for the glory of God. I would like to see that God has given knowledge and abundant provision to Aliosha and his wife Liuba in order to move on with the team.

In obedience to our heavenly Father, we have brought the salvation message to many parts of the world, and this portion of faith on wheels has reached its ending but first, I would like to recommend something to the Contemporary church of the XXI century.

Are you looking for great things for yourself? Don't look for them, because it is NOT on this earth full of sin, where God wants you to enjoy greatness. Instead He has asked us to give what we have to the poor and have a treasure in heaven where nothing will be lost or corrupt and all lives for eternity.

Sincerely, Pedro

1/11/2009 10:50:00 AM



The team entering Russia and arriving to Bataisk. Our small camp in Bataisk. We parked the kitchen bus in front and had a 6 x8 meter Canopy tent for small meetings, You can see our small but cozy camper in front of the house which served as the sisters's dorm. Brother Aliosha, to the left, organized the brothers as we worked in the factory to make our benches.



The children were always excited to listen and to learn the songs with movements. We had daily a crowd of kids coming to our children's meetings and also just to visit. We made many freinds and I started to take pictures of them and soon I had the parents ther also wanting me to take pictures, which became a good way to make freinds with everyone in the neighbourhooood.





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We put up the big tent for the first time in the city of Koleshovka. It was already autumn when we finally got the permission. A church in South Russia, in Krasnodar saw the tent and wanted to borrow it, at least for the winter, so we offered to lend it to them and also that we could bring them another tent from Italy as we were given a big truck and trailer from Brother Grazio Genovese in Sicily. Going through Austria we had to put the truck on a special train as Austria has very strict laws of airpollution. The church in Krasnodar received some donations from the USA and they bought a new tent which we brought them. Underneath you see the first meeting in their new tent. We ge ours back and continued the work with the team in other cities of Russia in the area of Krasnodar.



Our daily bread. In Russia bread and potatoes are very important. At the home of Yura and Tania Strelanie we met many times, it was like a home for all of us. Tania gave us lessons in children's ministry and the picture is when we get certificates of the study. You can see above as the brothers are putting up the tent in Gulkevich.



The camp in Azov was beautiful, it was a big park, which about 200 years ago was a cemetery. We had people coming night and day just to talk with us or wanting counseling, the meetings were very good and we would get crowds of about 200 people. You can see the group of people taking baptism after the campaign in Azov, as we celebrated the baptism together with the Baptist church. However not everyone were happy to see our success and soon we started to have threats from the Cossacks. We didn't believe that they would actually do any harm but one Sunday noon when we came back from the different church services we had visited, we found the whole camp in a mess, the benches in a huge pile, the tent ropes cut and the poles and tent bridges bent as they had fallen one over another. The Cossacks had come, together with about 400 middle aged women and the Orthodox Priests. They came in busses directly from the Mass. While singing and praying they destroyed our camp and the Priests telling them that they were doing God's work.



We continued the campaign nevertheless, even if we were under tressas the whole time, but when our permit for the place finished we were not able to get any more permits as other Mayors in other places were afraid that something similar would happen and we ended up living outside Azov in an abandoned factory.