
MY LIFE STORY



Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Matthew 19:14

Alex Krutov

Foreword

It has been my privilege to edit Alex's story. Through his life, I have learned the value of the bonding of child and parent in infancy and childhood. According to this God-designed relationship the foundation of trust is laid in healthy human beings to prepare them in time to transfer that trust to a wholesome trust in God, our Lord and Savior. For Alex, spiritual bonding to his heavenly Father was initiated before much deep and lasting human bonding. You will learn from his story in a powerful way how God his Father then brought him into essential God-designed family relationship. By his design, God provides for us and expresses his love, forgiveness, discipline and grace through the human family. We are his kingdom agents through whom he reaches out to others.

Alex's life demonstrates the impact that the family of God has upon individual lives. His life is also clear evidence of God watching out for those whom he has called to be his own, even before they have knowledge of him. Indeed, if Alex's dream is God-given, and we believe it is, though it may undergo considerable reshaping, it will reveal once again that his kingdom family is intended to bring his goodness to entire cultures. May the Fatherhood of God and his kingdom family one day touch the lives of thousands of Russian orphans through one redeemed and transformed orphan, Alex Krutov, whom they have cared to love in Christ's name.

Sue Gregg

July, 2001

CONTENTS

Prologue - Through the Eyes of His Teacher	1
Age 1 Month - Three Years	3
Age Three - Six Years	3
Age Seven - Eighteen Years	4
A Disastrous Adoption	8
Finding New Life	10
A New Family	11
America	12
A Second American Chance	15
My Life & Work in Russia Today	17
My Future Dream and Vision	24
Preparing to Reach My Vision	26
July, 2001 - The Harbor	27

Prologue - Through the Eyes of His Teacher

For the first time in September, 1986, I walked into the first grade in Orphanage #51 in St. Petersburg, Russia. I saw twenty six boys and girls who were looking at me with their blue, brown and gray eyes. Their souls were opened to me and trusted me as well. My heart was washed with a warm wave of joy and thanks to God for this opportunity to work with these beloved and dear children. Even after working in the orphanage for fifteen years I still don't understand adults who abandon and betray souls of children so needy for love and with a patient innocent hopefulness waiting for that dear person who will offer it to them. At such a young age they are filled with sadness, mistrust and anger, yet always full of hope for happiness, the goodness of life, and for happy moments.

Out of twenty six children, I especially noticed Alex, a nine year old skinny, tall boy with very curly and beautiful dark hair and brown eyes. He was so alive and artistic, with a bright temperament. In behavior, Alex didn't have a 50%-

50% emotional balance. If he was happy, then everyone would know it and realize it from his hyper-screams and high jumps. Yet, from time to time, he was very angry or sad, his responses as pronounced as when he was happy. He would be loudly impatient and hardly agreeable. Alex was very generous and it was unlimited, but his anger was also endless.

Alex liked to read poems, sing, and participate in all of the dramas, concerts and holidays. Everyone would notice Alex so easily, but it was very important that he needed very strong leadership and a person



Alex (back row, 2nd from right) with his orphanage group. Melana (far left); Edward, 3rd left from Melana

whom he could trust. It seemed that at the end of 1987 that opportunity appeared for him. A very respectable, middle aged couple decided to adopt him. In 1988 the last adoptive procedure was completed and he was taken to live with his new family. This family changed his age and his name. They took him to a nice little town called Sestroretzck. But mere attraction to a child is not enough to make a decision to adopt him. You must with all your soul love this child, understand him and accept him the way he is, the way the Lord has created him and his life. You must take responsibility for his future life, whatever it takes. But people who never had any children do not have enough knowledge, experience and faith. Their

love can't handle such a lesson. They try to break the independence and life of this child. I don't call this love. I call this the same as you would want to rape or abuse him. Alex couldn't stand the abuse and bad words that he received because of problems at school. He began to run away from home.

The first of February in 1990, Alex came back to my group in the orphanage. But his soul was very sad and angry, and his heart was broken. Again, adults had betrayed him, didn't want him and didn't understand him. I was

happy to see Alex back in my class. He began to appreciate the quiet atmosphere in our communal home and he replied very softly to me and his classmates. However, I began to notice that Alex was very concerned about his future and wanted to come out of the life circle that circumstances had put him in. He was searching for new life and contacts.

The real wake up call came to him in 1992 after he met Sherry Oxendine, an American missionary who had come to support our orphanage. Their relationship and conversation gave him a clear picture

about Christianity and later he received Jesus into his heart and life. Only then did he find out for himself that the only father, teacher and comforter could be God.

Finally, in 1993, the court decided to place me back in the orphanage since for three years I was not officially there. By that time, Alex's feeling about the loss of his adoptive parents was subdued, because he was so busy studying English and the Bible. In addition, he was emotionally helped by his American friends, of whom he had more and more.

In 1994, Alex had one of the most important meetings in his life because he met Joyce Bourcier, who worked with the CoMission team in St. Petersburg. With her help Alex was invited to go to America for a year. This trip was to be to study in Green Fields Country Day School, a private high school and to live with the family, Hughes. He didn't do well at school according to American standards and because of that, the Hughes sent Alex back to Russia. Yet, Alex did not give up nor become discouraged. He had a dream, possibly a bit unrealistic, to become independent in the United States, not only to live and study there, but to become a citizen. All of his strength and wishes were focused to study and improve his English language. He wanted to show the Hughes, whom he deeply loved and cared for, his goal and dreams and what he would do in order to achieve them. In 1997, Alex took the TOEFL (English language) test and his score was high enough to get into a college. When he called the Hughes about passing the test, he hoped they would invite him back and give him one more chance to study in the U.S. Yet, although they were proud of him passing the test, they did not choose to invite him back.

But I know that God did not leave him alone, because Alex believes in him and has the Lord in his heart. In November of 1996, Alex met Rich and Sue Gregg for the second time in St. Petersburg. He worked with them as their guide, translator and helper. Those

wonderful people decided to invite Alex to the states for six months training to be a personal chef. In March of 1997, Alex's dream happened again. He learned so much in six months. At the end he received a certificate as a personal chef. In September of 1997, Alex returned to St. Petersburg, yet was positive in his heart that the only country he considered his own was America, because with all his soul he had received and learned their language, religion and saw their freedom and accepted this new understanding of life. This is how he tells me what Americans are like: They are so open, their hearts always ready to accept others with joy, a smile and with faith. They are a patriotic people because their government cares for its citizens and gives possi-

bilities to them to develop and use their talents and knowledge. Americans trust in their government to protect them. They work hard and are faithful and trustworthy workers. Of course, everyone is not like this, the government is not perfect, and America has many of its own serious problems. But these are the positive general characteristics of the American culture that have touched Alex's heart and life.

Even if Alex wants and dreams of studying and living in the United States and becomes a citizen of that country, he would like in the future to return

to Russia and open his own orphanage. By opening an orphanage he wants to change the system of life for orphaned children in Russian society. This is what I like most and makes me happy.

I am very proud of my student and constantly thank Americans, especially Christians, that they have played an important role in his life, helping him to develop his behavior, attitude, knowledge of the English language and Christianity, and thank them for their love, care, patience and hospitality. I know that God will reward every one of them, their children and their families for their love to Alex.



Alex and Edward in front of Orphanage

*You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted;
You encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed....
Psalm 10:17-18a*

Age 1 Month - Three Years

Twenty two years ago, in St. Petersburg, Russia, I was born, a child “fearfully and wonderfully made,” at about 7 lbs, 22 inches long, with dark hair and brown eyes. My mom, whom I have never seen, came to the hospital for my birth, but whoever was my dad wasn’t with her. He had done what he wanted with her and took off. Statistically, this is the case for most Russian orphans.

For the first few hospital days of my life, my mom was with me. But she felt she couldn’t take care of me and that it would be too hard for her to take on such a big responsibility as raising a child. Consequently, when we left the hospital, she left me by the garbage. Before long, someone mercifully found me and returned me to the hospital where I had been born. The identification tag with my name and date of birth was still on my arm. My return was a surprise to the hospital staff. On the one hand they were happy to see me, but on the other they didn’t know what to do.

Someone called the police and a social agency to find out where my mom was. She was located and requested to come and get me, but she said that she couldn’t do that because of her

finances and being so young. Her decision was not the best, although not the worst she could have done. Nevertheless, I was clearly abandoned by my parents. I write this part with tears. I try to imagine what it would be like to meet my biological mom after so many years. The older I become, I realize that no matter how great the pain caused by being abandoned by my mother, I must be healed of my bitterness. Often in my life I ask the Lord to comfort my heart and give me peace regarding my biological mom. I am beginning to have a measure of that peace. Because of it, I am able to thank God for my biological

Often in my life I ask the Lord to comfort my heart and give me peace regarding my biological mom. I am beginning to have a measure of that peace. Because of it, I am able to thank God for my biological mother who gave me life even if she abandoned me.

mother who gave me life even if she abandoned me. If it were not for her, I would never have been born to be so blessed by God. She has lost a lot by abandoning me, but maybe someday she will realize that and maybe we will see each other in heaven.

Until the age of 3, I was in a nourishment house for infants and small children. When I grew up I found out that I had been seriously ill during that time. I was too thin and almost died. I didn’t get enough milk from my mother which laid the foundation for further health problems. I am thankful for the person who found me on the street and brought me back to the hospital and didn’t let me die on the street from cold and hunger. I wish I knew who it was so that I could thank them and show them my gratitude for saving my life. I am grateful for the nurses who didn’t refuse me when I was brought back to the hospital, but accepted me and took care of me. They could very easily have rejected me, but the Lord did not let that happen.

Age Three - Six Years

I was transferred to Orphanage #6 in downtown St. Petersburg. Most of my first memories around age five were not traumatic. I had everything that I needed for good living conditions and I am thankful to God for all the daily care I received. On the other hand, more health problems surfaced such as slow physical motion development, some speech pathology and learning disability. At age 5, I became ill with pneumonia and was hospitalized for five months. Thereafter, I caught frequent colds and flu which often landed me back in the hospital. Sickness rather became an integral part of my life. My first teachers and houseparents in Orphanage #6 who raised me were nice and tried to do their best. They helped me with the beginning education level. Even if it was not an easy task they didn’t give up on me. Their dedicated work with me laid the foundation that

later enabled me to learn to read and write in Russian. I thank God for their faithful care.

We had food and clothes everyday. The doctors thankfully took care of us in sickness, while the cooks prepared the daily meals for us which kept us from going hungry and kept us growing. However, sometimes when we would eat I would see a mouse running across the floor. We were very frightened by them, because we had a lot of mice. At Orphanage #6, I also met Edik (Edward), age 4, whose parents had also abandoned him. We became the best of friends and have been lifelong friends to this day.

When I turned six years old, our teachers and houseparents said that Edik and I would be transferred to Orphanage #51 for older children of age six or seven to eighteen. The school there was one of the best in St. Petersburg among the regular public schools and the only one at that time where English was being taught. Children from all over the city would come to study there because of English. Some of them preferred to stay overnight just to experience its very nice atmosphere. Attached to the orphanage, the school was built in the 1960's. It was a very old and classy building with baroque style rooms, bronze, oak ceilings, marble fireplaces and crystal chandeliers. In high demand, this orphanage was not easy to get into. Not only did children want to study there and orphans want to live there, but those seeking orphanage jobs wanted to work there. Later, however, the orphanage was converted into a normal children's house. The new principal decided to either destroy it entirely or at least to paint it over so that kids wouldn't realize or notice what kind of building it had been. However, it was not easy to hide the original style from every child. It was my favorite building where I lived and studied.

Age Seven - Eighteen Years

When I first arrived at Orphanage #51, I looked forward to it somewhat, although I was not too excited about the idea of staying in the same place for so long. On the day of our arrival, the teachers greeted us with smiles and were very nice to us. They took us around and showed us where we would be

living for the next ten years or so. Our sleeping room was on the fourth floor. When I opened the door, a light fell off it and almost hit me on the head, but I jumped out of the way. I also noticed beds for twenty-five other boys plus three chairs for everyone as the only furniture. First impressions are powerful. I thought to myself, "Welcome to the real world and a new style of living."

The remainder of the my first day was full of more surprises. At dinnertime we had to wait an hour because there were 600 children. We ate in four shifts because of so many children. I thought, "Wow, I have never been in such a big orphanage!" I had not seen all these children during the day because they had been at school earlier in the day. I didn't know what to say and was disappointed with the news. I thought this orphanage was supposed to be one of the best in



At Melana's Dacha: L to R: Melana's husband, Maria, Sveta, Melana, Edward, Alex (about age 12-13)

the city, but my expectations for comfort had apparently been unrealistic.

Not long after our move to Orphanage #51, I was again hospitalized, this time for hernia surgery. Following the frightening experience of the operating table and view of the scalpel, I awoke in recovery with a high fever, vomiting, violent headache and difficulty breathing. I had been overdosed with narcotics, which necessitated a stay of two months. Upon a later hospital sojourn for a minor surgery, I suffered through a forgotten mustard poultice left on

my chest overnight, and before being dismissed the next morning, was checked for lice. The uninvited invaders were detected, and my head of thick and curly black hair was immediately and cleanly removed. Returning to the orphanage, my classmates, of course, made fun of me. I was mortified and decided to wear a hat until my hair grew back. Also wearing glasses at that time, I felt like a social misfit, not good for a child already detached from family.

During my years at Orphanage #51, five different principals were hired and then fired for being dishonest and for stealing from orphans. It may be surprising to hear that principals steal from orphans, but it is a very common occurrence in Russia. Younger orphans could also get into big trouble with older orphans. Abuse from older children is typical in the orphanages as I learned by personal experience the longer I lived there. They were stronger than we were and able to do whatever they wanted. Sometimes it would be like trying to survive in prison. You had to be strong and know how to fight back. Older children always picked on the younger, making fun of them, abusing or beating them, and insisting that they drink, smoke, swear or curse. Since I didn't want to drink, smoke or swear, I was a prime target for their abuse. Once, while I sat on a fourth floor window sill looking outdoors with some of my classmates, a group of drunk older children came by screaming, yelling and laughing. When they spotted us, they saw an occasion to attack. Although we blocked the door with chairs, tables and beds, we had forgotten to close the window. One of the boys climbed through the window from a window from a neighboring room and selected me out of ten boys for his target. He struck me hard against the wall in the face, stomach and shoulder. Where were our houseparents? They were sitting downstairs drinking tea. In tears and pain I ran into the school building announcing that I would not go back there that night. But it was too late for them to do much about it. A doctor's checkup revealed that I had escaped any broken bones.

I expected life to be good when we moved to Orphanage #51, but a typical saying, "Dream on baby" sort of became my acquired attitude. There were some bright spots, however. A week after my arrival, I met my new teachers and houseparents.

One of them whose name was Melana was a very nice lady. She came to the orphanage at a young age and was so beautiful. Somehow, many of us felt that she was going to be a real mom for us. I was happy about that. Every child needs hugs, kisses and special attention. Children are usually orphaned because of the fault of their parents. It is very sad that many parents commit such a sin against children. When we met Melana she said that she was going to be very fair to us and would treat us well if we treated her with respect. There were forty-five of us in our class and she felt love for every one. She was the first teacher



Melana with former student, Maria, at her wedding, Sept, 2000

and houseparent who loved us, helped us and cared for us continually. She treated us the way we should have been treated, and not like forgotten children. She let us to hug, kiss and call her mom when there was no one around us. She made our class like a family and brought many warm feelings to

many of us. She invited us to come to stay with her at her apartment on weekends. She let us meet her entire family who fell in love with all of us because we were so little and precious. Actually some of them still remember us and we see them from time to time. She took care of us while we lived at the orphanage sanatorium in the country. She took us to her dacha (country house) to teach us how to work physically and what it is to work hard and trustworthily. She trained us and taught us how to cook and take care of ourselves, how to make our beds and wash our clothes. She taught us how to control our temper and how to respect others.

She made us to think about our future and reasons why we live here today. She was there for us all the time when we needed her. She remembered and celebrated our birthdays in a way they never had been before she came.



Alex Leading Morning Exercises

Melana's colleague, Irina, didn't like us and she said that she would never hug, kiss or love us, because this was not her responsibility. On the one hand, she was not obligated to love us at all since we weren't her children. But who else would love us, if not the orphanage staff? This lack of affection is a serious problem in the orphanages in Russia. Teachers and houseparents refuse to love, hug and kiss us because we aren't their children. They say their own children are enough for them. Their main reason for taking a job in the orphanage is to make more money and have access to meals prepared for them. As it is officially in Russia, any orphanage teacher or houseparent gets paid 40% extra because it is more difficult to work with orphans than it is in a normal school. This is what attracts people to work in the orphanages in Russia. This is something that needs to be changed.

Melana also won our respect with her firm hand of discipline. She said that if we did something bad we must realize with our own head and brain that we did bad, it was wrong and we must be punished for it. But I am not talking about being abused. She also said, "Please don't mess with me because I know marshal arts and I am good at it." I said, "Yeah,

yeah," and she said, "Come to me." She decided to show her power of authority on me. Without realizing her strength, she lifted me over her back and threw me on the floor. I hit my back so hard that it took my breath away. She almost got into trouble. Both of us got so scared and afraid. She lifted me from the floor, put me on a chair and hit me hard on the back so that I could breathe. Everything was fine as soon as I began to breathe. Then I began to cry. Neither of us thought such a near disaster could happen, but I think it set the foundation for our future relationship. After that, she punished us, not with physical abuse, but through teaching so that we would learn to be responsible for our mistakes. She never punished us with no reason. When she punished us she would explain why we were being punished, which certainly helped us to realize that we were wrong and did a bad thing. Melana still works at Orphanage #51 and I still see her frequently and spend time with her. She is a great comforter when I need someone's encouragement or when I am upset or feel down.

After establishing herself with us, Melana taught me a special type of exercise which everyone enjoyed. For the next five years, I would wake up everyone, we would go into a big room and I would lead the children in an hour of exercises. Everyone enjoyed this kind of exercise. Once in the winter we even tried to run around the building barefoot, which many of us thought was great, too. I continued to lead exercises while I was at Sunvill where we were sent next, and again when I returned to the orphanage for another year at age 12. Already, I believe, God had me in training in different ways for my future even though I had no idea of it at that time.

When I was 10 and Edward 9, we were sent for four years to Sunvill (medical treatment center for children or sanatorium). This institution takes children who need minor medical treatment and a little bit extra special care because of poor health, such as better food, more individual care, and fresh country air.

When I had previously been in the hospitals in the city, I would get to know the nurses and doctors during my recovery period and begin to help them around the hospital since they always needed an extra

hand. When we were at the sanatorium I began to do the same thing so the doctors and nurses began to trust me with whatever they gave me to do. One day I was sent to the drugstore to pick up a bottle of medication. While returning with it, I became intrigued with what was in the bottle and foolishly decided to try some of it out. The tablets were very tasty and sweet. First I took 4 of the 10 tablets, then another 4. I began to get sleepy and disoriented. I laid down on a bench and fell asleep for 3 hours. Someone woke me, chiding me for sleeping on a bench in the middle of the day. When I returned to the sanatorium from what should have been a 30 minute trip, I fell to the ground when almost there, frightening my worried teacher and my classmates. The doctor had gone home. No one remembered to check about the medication I had been sent to bring back and I fell asleep at my desk. When I again awoke I requested to go to bed. I slept and did not want to get up for dinner. Then my teacher became more alarmed. After 12 hours the 8 tablets

began to take full effect. I awoke in the middle of the night with a lump in my throat obstructing my breathing and ability to drink water which I badly wanted. It seemed to worsen and my teacher kept checking every few minutes to see if I was still breathing. Next morning at 6

a.m. I requested permission to be dismissed from my leadership responsibility for the exercise workout. Finally my teacher realized she must do something. The doctor returned at 9 a.m. inquiring about the medication I had been sent to get. As soon as the teacher said I had not brought them, he realized what was wrong. At first I lied to him about the number of pills I had taken, but he knew it was more than 4 and said that if I had taken all ten of them, my chances for survival would have been dim. An ambulance hastened me to the hospital where my stomach and blood were cleaned out by a series of processes. I was in the



Melana cares for young orphans at sanatorium

hospital for a month. The drug I had taken was intended to be administered in one-fourth tablet doses once a day for nervous system disorders and temper control. This was Russia. But God was there, too, and had mercy on me and spared me. And I learned my lesson. Stay completely away from drugs.

Other than almost killing myself with a dangerous medication, living at the sanatorium was a great experience for me because being there protected us from many bad influences from the older orphans such as smoking, alcohol, bad words and cursing, which was actually one of our teachers' reasons for sending us there. It worked as long as we remained at the sanatorium. Unfortunately, when we returned to the orphanage the kids began to pick up these habits quickly and the beautiful picture was spoiled. Gradually the temptation to indulge overtook many of them. Usually it is a miracle if any of the children in the Russian orphanages leave without a

As I look back, I see how God was protecting me from a host of destructive dangers....Not only was He protecting me, but I was also given more opportunity for making a positive contribution to the life of the orphanage...

lifestyle of cursing, smoking or drinking alcohol. In the beginning, there were forty five children in my class. By ninth grade there were only twelve. Out of the twelve only four, who have good character and set their priorities, have gone on to prepare to reach their goals and dreams.

The rest of the group reveals a sad picture. Three girls are prostitutes, two boys are in prison and others are on the streets. Some of them have graduated from two year colleges, but haven't set their priorities and goals so they are drifting without purpose.

In addition to being reintroduced to these destructive habits upon our return to Orphanage #51, we had to leave our elementary school teachers and houseparents who cared for us and move on to the fifth grade. They had allowed us to call them our mom and loved us. As soon as we had a new staff,

they didn't care and were mean to us. We also returned to the dangers of child abuse from older orphans. I remember the evening that Dinna, bigger, taller and stronger than I decided to spit into my food. He was from the "bad" side of our fourth floor and I was from the "good" side, so he didn't like me. Although I was fast and could out-run him, he ambushed me and struck me in my back which sent me sprawling across the floor. An X-ray showed no damage, but it took a month to heal the pain. The principal said there was nothing she could do about Dinna's behavior, so I called the police department to a friend who worked there as an inspector for young criminals. She came to the orphanage and talked to Dinna and the principal. She threatened Dinna with jail if he touched me one more time. The inspector was aware of Dinna's bad behavior. This was a last warning. Following this incident I felt vindicated and some respect from Dinna.

...I had been dreaming of a family of my own. I thought that this was my chance...

Another incident that made a deep impression on me was when I was attacked from above, from the 4th floor with a bottle of water thrown out the window at my head. Something inside me said just in time, "Alex move." I did, escaping another possible injury or worse. As I look back, I see how God was protecting me from a host of destructive dangers in spite of the faulty and inept system I grew up in. Not only was he protecting me, but I was also given more opportunity for making a positive contribution to the life of the orphanage by helping the night house parents put younger children in bed, making sure they all brushed their teeth, washed their faces and feet and were ready for the next day. Since some children were very tough so that the house parents couldn't handle them, I was given the responsibility. I was a fifth, sixth and seventh grader at that time.

A Disastrous Adoption

One day a Russian couple came to the sanatorium. They took one look at me and seemed to fall in love with me at first sight. You know, me too with

them, because I had been dreaming of a family of my own. I thought that this was my chance. They requested to take me to their home for couple of days. I agreed and went with them. I loved it and they seemed very nice people. They were in their early 30's but still did not have any children. Nicolai was a phone electrician and Larisa worked at the post office. I spent some weekends with them over a period of six months and had a great time. They came to the sanatorium almost every day, because their home was only ten minutes walking distance. They lived in a big house built of wood with no heating or water. Water was hauled to the house from a well in a bucket and warmth created from the fireplace. But I liked it and learned that if they adopted me, I would be attending a regular high school. I liked that idea, too. The more time they spent with me, the more they wanted to

adopt me and I wanted to be with them too. They talked to my teachers and principal about adoption. The

principal said, "Please don't hurry with your final decision, because a child is not a toy." But Nicolai and Larisa made their final decision and began the adoption process. In six months they took me to their home. I couldn't quite believe that I really had my own parents.

I was very excited and everything was so good in the beginning until I went to school. It was huge and there were 30 students in my class. My teacher was elderly and had serious difficulty with hearing and with vision. I got to know the other students and my classmates well and became good friends with them. But Nicolai and Larisa wanted to raise a perfect son and a student. Their goal was to make me an infant prodigy (meaning perfect and "straight-A-only" student). However I was not *wunderkindt* and never will be. I can study and get "B's", but not straight "A's." Another problem was the poor vision of my teacher at school. Whenever she heard a noise she thought that it was just me and no one else. At the end of the class she would write a note to my parents in my notebook that I didn't obey and my discipline was very bad. I knew that I wasn't the best in class,

yet not the worst, but my teacher acted as though I was the worst of all. When I would get home my dad would ask for my note. When he saw this note he said, "Take off your clothes. I am going to teach you how to obey and have good discipline in the class." Many times I tried to explain to him that it wasn't me, but he wouldn't listen to me. Sometimes when I refused to take off my clothes, he would do it himself and throw me on the bed. Then he took off his leather army belt and would beat me until he could see some bruises on my back. Then he told me to get dressed and do my homework. I had never been physically abused like that and I was shocked when he did that for the first time, especially since they had adopted me because they wanted me. I felt that I might be in big trouble. Would he abuse me every time I brought home either lower than "A" or a note from my teacher? I wanted to escape! I was hoping that my mom would be different than my dad, but one night all night she forced me to rewrite all of my notebooks so they would look neat and clean. I couldn't sleep, drink or eat until I was finished. She stood over me with a stick. When I was finished I said that I hated both of them and wished I were dead. She told me if I wanted she could help me so she brought a rope and put it on my neck and then put a knife to my throat. I was incredulous.

My dad's abuse became his apparent hobby. I am afraid many people have no idea what it is like to be abused by an angry alcoholic man. It is something I would never wish on anyone. I began to run away from home to St. Petersburg, about 28 miles away. I didn't have money, food or good clothes with me, but I felt I had no choice. It was better to run away than to live with them. Sometimes I tried to take a train until the police would get me off. Sometimes people would pick me up in their car, but most of the time I walked. When I became cold and hungry I would look for a house with a barn. If no one was in it, I would go in to look for food. If I found canned food, I would take it and eat it, feeling like I had no choice. When I made it to St. Petersburg, my first stop was the orphanage, but they would not accept me, because I had parents now, and I had to go back to them.

Consequently, I often spent the night hungry, cold and overexposed on the streets, or in a basement or wherever I could find a place to live until the police would catch me and call my parents to come and get me. I



*Alex with his childhood
"Angel Aunt" Marina*

became familiar with about every police department in the city. I would return home with my parents until they abused me again. Life like this lasted for almost two years. After running away over twenty times, I was tired and stole a bike so that I could get to the city faster. But then I felt bad and returned the bike to the owner when I returned home.

Finally, when I ran away, a man helped me financially with 15 rubles. When I was returned home, I hid the rubles, but my parents discovered my deed. My reward was the worst beating of all, a lash for each ruble that put me in bed for a week with a body covered with bruises. When I was recovered, I ran away for good.

After living with them for a year my adoptive parents had their own baby. They no longer had any need for me then, and didn't care for me at all. When I left for the last time, I went to a park in St. Petersburg in mid-November. It was a very cold day. I was very hungry and crying in the park, lying on a bench. No one stopped to help me until one couple passed by and asked, "Why are you crying?" I told them my story. They took compassion on me and they decided to take me to their home. They bathed me, fed me, gave me new clothes and put me in bed. The next morning I told them what had happened and they decided to help me. These people who rescued me off the streets that day were Misha and Marina. I call them Aunt Marina and Uncle Misha. I still see them from time to time and I praise God for them and ask the Lord to reward them for saving me and helping me at such a desperate time in my life. They were like angels on earth sent by the Lord at the very moment I needed them. He was watching over me all the time.

I told Misha and Marina that I had tried to go back to the orphanage, but they had refused me because I was now an adopted child with my own parents. Any problems I had with my adoptive parents was considered none of their business. There was nothing they could do. Marina went with me all the way to that little town and talked to my parents. She said, "Who gave you the right to abuse a child?" Of course, they denied everything and said that they didn't want me anymore. They said that if they ever saw me again they would kill me. Marina realized that I couldn't return to this house again, so she had to do something to help me get back into the orphanage. She knew that it wouldn't be easy. But she committed herself to that project. Yes, she did succeed in it and I was received back into the orphanage, but I was still considered as having parents. This meant that Nicolai and Larisa could legally reclaim me any time. Refusal of their parental rights required a court ruling. The court decided to charge the family with criminal abuse of a child and even to put Nicolai in prison. But this couple had their own child now and I thought that it wouldn't be good for this child to grow up without a father. I knew very well what it would be like to be without a father. I requested the judge to please let them go and allow me back into the orphanage. What I wanted was just to forget them and act like nothing had ever happened even if I knew that wouldn't be easy. In spite of this desire, the entire experience took a heavy toll on me emotionally for a long time. What I had dreamed would be wonderful new family life turned out to be nightmare.

Who could I trust? After this family I had probably seven more offers to be adopted by Russian families, but I refused all of them because I was afraid that I might be abused again. I made my decision that I would never be adopted again until I left the orphanage.



Sherry

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

Romans 10:15b



Doug

The more time I spent with Sherry, the more I began to like her and wanted her to adopt me. She thought of it too, but somehow it didn't work out for her. I was very disappointed, but apparently the Lord had something else in mind for me. Maybe I wouldn't have my goal and dream to help orphans in Russia if Sherry had adopted me. However I would have had a mom for the first time in my life. Sherry shared good news of God's love for me through Christ, how much he loved me and that he was waiting for me to give my heart to him and follow him. She made me think about it more carefully and seriously. Before I met Sherry, I had already tried to commit suicide five times and I also had almost been killed three times. I thought that I

*A father of the fatherless...
is God in His holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families.
Psalm 68:5-6a*

Finding New Life

My failed adoption was a devastating emotional experience. I was angry, sad and broken inside. I was crying out for a new and different life. Life back in the orphanage continued both good and bad. In 1992, Sherry Oxendine from America came to my orphanage when I had my fifteenth birthday. She

was the very first American I ever met and she brought us some gifts. She gave me a little auto car model which didn't interest me, so I asked her if she had something else that I would enjoy receiving. As she went through her bag she found a wallet and gave it to me. I felt like it was the happiest day of my life. It was also the beginning of our long-term friendship. Sherry later became an official sponsor of my orphanage and she visited Russia three times a year. On each visit to Russia Sherry would always spend time with me and take me for a day on a

tour. We also celebrated our birthdays together because the dates are only a week apart.

The more time I spent with Sherry, the more I began to like her and wanted her to adopt me. She thought of it too, but somehow it



must do something about my life or otherwise I might do something disastrous. However, the Lord kept me from doing that. I know why he has protected my life and I am very thankful to him. Sherry encour-

aged my interest to learn more English and come to the United States. Since then I wanted to go to the states desperately. She also encouraged me to think about my future and my goal over the years. Sherry moved to Moscow with her husband, Jim, in 1997 to continue her work with Russian orphanages. I continue to keep in touch with her. In 1999, Sherry brought in a team of young people from America to Orphanage #51 in St. Petersburg, where I spent most of my childhood, to do a renovation project on the fourth floor. I was able to join the team for 2 weeks of hard work with them. It was a very rewarding experience for me. I am thankful for everything she has done for me and for our orphanage, which is extensive.

Throughout my life I needed parents' love and was reaching out for it, but no one could really satisfy my need deep inside, because people who tried to give me their love weren't my parents, after all. I just couldn't accept their love because it wasn't the love that I was looking for. But I kept responding hopefully to new friends such as Sherry, and Salme and Errki Lahtinen from Finland, who also came to my school and shared with me about the Lord. They invited me to come to church, but it was hard for me to dedicate myself to going there every Sunday. Yet, I am thankful for their love, care, help, warmth and encouragement. They invited me to visit their country for a month in 1998 and it was my first trip out of Russia after returning from America. I am thankful for their hospitality while I was staying with them in Finland and for their emotional and spiritual support.

In 1993, Doug Jester came to Russia and lived in St Petersburg for a year as part of the Navigator CoMission team. Doug came to my school and met me. It was the beginning of a mutual friendship. I

found his address in St. Petersburg so that I could meet him and talk to him more about Christ because Sherry had already encouraged my interest in him. After school almost everyday I would go to Doug's apartment just 10 minutes away. We would spend the time together talking about how my day went and what I did that day at school. After about two months he asked me if I was interested in studying or at least discussing the Bible. I said, "Yes, let's try." We had to have an interpreter then because Doug did not know Russian and my English was not too good. We met twice weekly for Bible study, concluding our visits with tea and prayer time. A month later, Doug invited me to his church and I accepted his invitation. The International Church of St. Petersburg was very different from the Russian Orthodox Church that I was familiar with. People were friendly and glad to see us. I became a regular visitor and then a member

of this church, which was started by an American Christian who lived in Russia for three years. Every Sunday morning I came to Doug's apartment, we had breakfast together and then we went to church. Sometimes after church we had lunch, as well, and just some fun time together. I attended church with Doug for three months when the pastor made an invitation. He asked if there was anyone who knew about the Lord, but hadn't accepted him into his heart as Savior. I said to myself, "I must be the one." I prayed, talked to Doug and I thought very

carefully about accepting the Lord into my heart, because for me it was a very special decision to make about my future and my life. Later I went up to the stage to accept the Lord into my heart. I felt joy, peace and a happiness after I prayed to God, the Father and the Savior, "Please change my life and heart, because I do realize that I am a sinner and I do believe in you with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my mind" (Matthew 22:37). He comforted



***The Lyon family
Bob, Rita, Lisa, Molly
& Galia (front left)***

me as my Father, since I had no earthly father or mother. Praise God!

A New Family

My life began to change in everything. God was covering a lot of my sufferings and I learned much about his love for me and about his forgiveness. I received many blessings and opportunities, especially working with the Navigator CoMission teams that were now in my city. I served



Mel & Mary Lou

them as a helper in a variety of ways, as an interpreter and as a tour guide. I got to know them and they all gave me their love, their hospitality, their care, their spiritual nurturing, their encouragement and their prayers when I visited them. They were helping me in so many amazing and significant ways. Sam and Pam Rhine helped me to process my first International passport, which brought my goal to visit America closer to reality. Later in 1995, I was able to go to America for the first time. I am grateful that Sam came to my orphanage and shared with my teachers about Christ and spoke about the serious problem of AIDS. Institutions such as orphanages need lectures like that continually. To me it was very important that he cared for the orphans in this way. I want every orphan to understand the dangers of AIDS and other health hazards that come from ignoring God's moral standards. This is part of my future teaching goal for a model Russian orphanage.

Bob and Rita Lyons brought their own children to a totally strange country to live here for an entire year to share God's love with the Russian people. They have been a unique example to me of love and care. Bob did one-on-one Bible studies with me. But most special to me is the way they adopted Galia at age 14

from my orphanage. For an entire year before they adopted her they got to know her and spent quality time with her. They gave her special love, care, attention, help, patience, encouragement and spiritual growth that she never had before or received from anyone. This prepared them not to give up on her after they adopted her. I am very proud of them for not giving up when they had so many troubles with her because of the language and culture barrier. Many people adopt children from Russia without even realizing what kind of responsibility that is, or what the special needs of orphans are in addition to the language and cultural barriers. Not being properly prepared in advance, they frequently find themselves involved in many unexpected difficulties with the child. This can cause much trauma for both parents and child. Occasionally, a child may even be sent back into the orphanage system. This just breaks my heart because it is devastating to the child and to the adoptive parents. The Lyons recognized that to adopt an orphan as one of their own meant that they must keep the commitment for life as they would to their own natural born children no matter what unexpected difficulties they would encounter. I am deeply grateful for this example of sacrificial giving.



Joyce



**The Achgill family
Bob, Suzanne, Amber,
Merinda, Dustin**

help, attention, spiritual training and lessons, and hospitality. They shared their home with me like I was their own child. They let me stay there when I didn't

Mel and Mary Lou Duke, head of the Navigator CoMission Team in St. Petersburg for five years, have become to me like my grandparents for their love, care,

have a place to stay. They fed me when I didn't have anything to eat. When I needed a job or didn't have a stable income they did what they could to give me some job projects, such as helping Rich and Sue Gregg out when they came to St. Petersburg. In this way I was able to earn some money to pay for my rent, food and clothes in St. Petersburg. I am grateful and thankful to God for them. In 1999 I had the privilege of helping them move a large portion of their belongings from St. Petersburg where they were stored to Talinn, Estonia where they plan to carry on their ministry in year 2000. They continue to be a valuable source of godly counsel and prayer in my life.

Bob and Suzanne Acghill of the Navigators have lived in St. Petersburg for the past five years. This family has let me use their computer to keep in touch with my friends through email about as often as I need to. They have given me much love, care, help, counsel, encouragement, hospitality, and let me do my laundry since I don't have my own washing machine. They let me stay in their house and fed me too. I am grateful for their trust, patience and training. I am thankful for their children that I can work with them and spend some time playing with them and taking care of them. This experience with the children has been important for me for extra training in how to love and take care children that aren't your own. To love your own children is a lot easier than to love someone else's or orphans.



*The Hughes family
John, Thompson, Justin & Cole*

America

Joyce Bourcier joined the Navigator CoMission Team in Russia for two years. She loved me like her own child and understood how hard it was for me to live in the orphanage. She gave me her love, care, help, patience, attention, encouragement, her

hospitality and many other things. She knew very well how badly I wanted to come to the states. She knew of a family in America looking for a child to come and stay with them, so she recommended me to them. She helped me to process the papers so that I could go to the states for a year. It wasn't that easy, because I was still in the orphanage and it is very difficult to get visas for unadopted orphans. The family in America couldn't adopt me because I was too old for adoption so that developed many problems. The U.S. Consulate is extremely wary of allowing Russians into America who have no family or property ties in Russia, because of the fear that they will not return to Russia once in America. But Joyce didn't give up.

She helped me to fill out the applications and write an essay in order to apply to high school for a year in America.

John and Thompson Hughes in Tucson, Arizona were the couple that Joyce recommended to invite me to live with them for a year and go to school in America. They were my first family that I lived with who accepted me and treated me like their own son and provided me everything during that year. They shared their home with me, sent me to high school for a

semester, then to the University of Arizona to study English as a Second Language in order to take the TOEFL test that would allow me to enter a four year university to get a degree. They took care of my health, especially my teeth. John is a dentist and did a lot of dental work which was very important and urgent. In the orphanage your health might be very poor, because of lack of good medications and also because no one cares for you that much. At Orphanage #51 where I lived for ten years I developed serious teeth, back, stomach and foot problems. I tried to do something in Russia, but was unsuccessful to get the care I needed. The Hughes loved me and cared for me very much in practical ways such as this. Thompson would also give me a goodnight kiss. You cannot

imagine how meaningful this was for an orphan who never had a mom to give him the kisses and hugs that come naturally to her as her child is growing up. How can an orphan who never received this affection, even in adulthood, prepare appropriately for having his own family and children? It is important that people realize what it is to kiss and hug just because you love a person.

The Hughes also took me to the Promise Keepers Men's Conference in Seattle, Washington, to visit Thompson's brother in Chicago, Illinois, and Thompson's mom and dad in Sun City, Arizona and arranged for me to travel a lot around the United States by myself to see my friends in twenty-two states. They made Baskin Robins ice cream a family memory, and celebrated my birthday with more gifts than I had ever received. They took me down-hill skiing in Taos, New Mexico, visiting their cabin in the mountains. They hosted many parties, letting my school friends visit their home for the party or just fun time. They financed piano classes for me for a year. There is so much to tell you why I am grateful and thankful to this family, but the most important is that they were the first real family in my life who loved me like their own son. To me this is the most valuable memory about them.

When I was having some difficulties with my studies, John Hughes offered me the choice of working on the kitchen crew at Eagle Lake Camp which was run by the Navigators in Colorado during the summer of 1996. I was very disappointed and lonely at first because I didn't want to go there at all and cook everyday for almost 450 children. But, after awhile, I began to ask God and seek for a friend who would pray and study the Bible with me and talk with me about my life and my future vision, besides being just a buddy. One day, after I had been at the camp almost a month and a half, my counselor came by the kitchen while I was finishing up the cleaning and reminded me that I needed to stop to attend the staff meeting. I didn't want to do this because it is my nature to complete a job perfectly before quitting, especially if it is a job of cleaning and organizing everything neatly. Nevertheless, I did finally decide to stop my work and go to the meeting. On my way out, I noticed a young man sitting in the dining room

reading his Bible. As we glanced at each other, I sensed an interest between us. When I returned to finish my work after the meeting, he was still there. I decided to introduce myself. This was how Danny Cowell and I met. He was about two years older than I and a counselor. He had worked at the camp for quite some time and had enjoyed every year of it. When



Brothers Danny & Alex

Danny learned that I was from Russia, he told me that he always wanted to go to Russia, but had not yet had a chance to do it. We then sat and talked for almost two hours.

Interestingly, Danny and I lived in the same tent and shared the same bunk bed. Although I was aware of that, I never really paid any attention to him before. But that night of our afternoon talk, I began to pay attention. I looked down from my bunk and saw that he was reviewing a pack of Bible verses which he did every night. I asked him to explain what he was doing. I was shocked, because I had never seen so many verses and I never thought that it was possible to memorize so many verses out of the Bible. I asked him if he would teach me how to memorize Bible verses, too. The next evening Danny explained everything to me about memorizing scripture. I was amazed and was inspired to memorize too. When I asked him where to start, he instructed me to buy a verse pack at the camp store so that I could begin writing on the cards the verses that I wanted to memorize.

When we met the next day, we read 1 Corinthians 13 together. Danny explained the meaning and importance of God's love in it to me and suggested that I try to memorize 1 Corinthians 13, verse by verse every night, and report to him when I had it memorized. He planned that we would work on memorizing it together. That night I memorized two

verses. The next day I memorized the entire chapter. Danny was amazed because he didn't expect me to memorize the the entire chapter so quickly. After that, we met together in the dining room every night to study the Bible and pray.

Our friendship grew stronger day by day. It was then that I learned that Danny's best buddy, Garret, had gotten married and no longer had the same time and interest for his friendship with Danny. Danny had been praying for a new friend like Garret just as I was also praying for such a friend. I discovered that I could talk to Danny about anything and be open with him and he accepted me. He was the first person in my life that I could trust myself to be open with. Sometimes my feelings were very strong toward Danny. I didn't even know how to express them or what to do with those feelings. God was bridging a bond of deep brotherly friendship between us. God was doing so much in both of us through our mutual encouragement of each other. We both felt so blessed by God.



The mountain at Eagle Lake was beautiful with a cross at the top. You could see Pikes Peak from there. Danny and I would often hike up there at night to spend some time to pray together and talk. Weekly on Fridays, the camp changed camp groups, giving us two more relaxed days, even though I still had to cook for the counselors. During this time we would go to Colorado Springs to do our laundry and spend some time hanging out. We would often go to the coffee shop, sometimes staying late just drinking coffee and talking. Every moment that I spent with Danny was a blessing to me and I was afraid that I would lose him. He had become so special to me that I wanted our relationship to last forever.

I sensed that I was beginning to grow

spiritually in a new way because of my special times with Danny. For example, one evening our counselors instructed us to pack up our stuff for an overnight solo spiritual retreat alone in the forest. This was one of the camp activities to encourage spiritual growth. But since my childhood I didn't like being alone in the dark, especially in the woods. Since Colorado has bears and many other wild animals in the forests, the idea of being in the woods alone didn't appeal to me at all. On our retreat we would be separated about 50 feet from each other and spend some time alone with

God. We took our sleeping bags and trekked to the woods. Initially, I hated that idea and said that I was going back to camp, but they wouldn't allow me.



Rich & Sue

I decided to stay. As I was left alone I began to pray, sang the songs and looked up at the sky and the stars. I saw what a beautiful picture of creation that the Lord made. Then I lay down to sleep. I awoke before the sun rose and began to sing songs of praise to God. When the sun rose, I saw a beautiful sunrise. I was speechless when I saw such beauty. Around noon our counselors came to pick us up and take us back to camp to eat. Then we sat around the table and shared what



Serving CoMission Team Christmas Dinner, 1996



Becoming a Personal Chef

about to expire and I had to leave America. I wept that night and I asked Danny to sit with me alone by the fire and just pray. As he and I were praying, I looked at the sky and the Lord spoke to me in the map that was set in the stars, saying that I must go back to Russia. I didn't want that, but as Danny was there with me to

we had seen, and about our time with the Lord. I was so thankful to them for giving me this opportunity.

Near the end of the summer I had to make the decision about what I would do next. My visa was



Intern Alex teaching his student, Jonathan

had a wonderful and blessed time with him again.

Now Danny is married to Stacy and has many other responsibilities. I still pray and hope that this spiritual relationship that we had will never end and will last forever even if I don't see him as much or hear from him as much as I did before. But I still love, miss, think about, and pray for him everyday. I am thankful for Danny that he taught me how to memorize the scripture, to love the Lord, to trust Him completely no matter what, for being a wonderful brother and buddy as he still is, for his encouragement, support, help, and many other things the Lord has taught me through him. I praise God daily for bringing Danny into my life.



Preparing dinner for 30 at the Hughes'



Serving the Olsons and friends

encourage me, I understood that it was the best for me. When I returned to Russia we kept in touch with each other, prayed for one another and I missed him very much. When I returned to the states for the second time I was able to visit Danny for a week at his home in Kansas. During this time we drove together from Kansas to Tennessee to his University. I

A Second American Chance

Sue Gregg visited St. Petersburg Russia for the first time in 1994 when I was 16 years of age and still living in the orphanage. I was attending International Church of St. Petersburg every Sunday. One Sunday she was there and I met her. Sue was invited to St. Petersburg by Mel and Mary Lou Duke who were overseers of the St. Petersburg Navigator CoMission Team. They invited Sue to teach nutrition seminars to the CoMission team members who needed to eat well to remain healthy in order to carry out their ministry in Russia. Sue is an author of healthy and nutritious cookbooks. She and her husband, Rich, have built their writing and publishing cookbook business over twenty years.

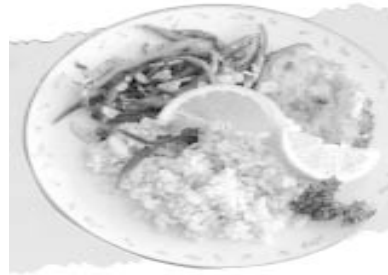


Personal Chef Graduate, Sept. 1997

Sue returned to St. Petersburg in 1996 with her husband, Rich, shortly after I returned to Russia from living with the Hughes and my summer with Danny at Eagle Lake Camp. Rich and Sue needed much assistance to do their work and I was available. For five weeks, I helped them with the shopping, seminars, cooking, city travel by metro, taxi, bus and on foot, took them on tours and did interpreting for them. We began to get to know each other better and developed a very good friendship.

As a result of my work with them and our friendship, Sue asked me if I liked to cook and if I would be interested in cooking and learning some good things about healthy and nutritious food. Rich and Sue then invited me to stay with them for six months in America in their home so that Sue could teach me how to be a personal chef based on healthy and nutritious food. I liked being in the states so much that I wanted to go back. My answer was yes.

Living with Rich and Sue was different from what I had expected, so honestly I had some problems with the Greggs, but Sue invited me to stay with her and she just couldn't give up or send me back to Russia. Through difficulties and fun I passed the exam and honestly enjoyed every moment of it even if it wasn't easy. I actually had the same kind of problem with the Hughes when I lived with them. It is very difficult for an orphan to live with a family and do what they tell you to do when he has never learned



how to relate to a family. I am very thankful to Rich and Sue for teaching me about their business and not giving up on such a difficult child like I have been.

I am thankful for all of the great experience I had for six months cooking for 37 guest families which was about 277 people in state of California and Arizona. Twenty-four of those guest meals I served to families and their friends, or to small groups from Trinity Church in Redlands, California, where I attended church weekly with Rich and Sue. I am grateful for their openness to receive me into their homes to be guinea pigs with their guests for my student meals and to befriend me.

I am also grateful to Sue for sharing with me the gospel and teaching me and studying the Bible together for 30 minutes daily. It meant so much to me and I also needed it badly too. I am thankful for Sue's and my trips to the beach and all the other times we spent together. I am thankful for our weekly Sunday evening dinner meetings at a restaurant, just talking about how I was doing and what I needed to do, the menu, what was on her heart and her feelings and if I had done something wrong. Sometimes those kind of meetings were emotionally very hard for me and I am sure for her too. Our meeting would end poorly and I would be angry with Sue. But what encouraged me to forgive her was her patience, care, attention and the most great was LOVE. Sometimes I look back and I want to weep for all the sorrows and tears I caused her and I ask the Lord to forgive me. I am grateful that she has forgiven everything that I caused her. The most valuable thing of all to me is she is mom to me and the first mom in my life whom I love and con-

sider my real mother. I love her so much and she loves me. God brought us together so that my mom, Sue, will be there to encourage, help, cheer up, love and hug me, and so that the Lord can heal my broken, bitter, sorrowed heart from all of the sorrows in my life.

While with Rich and Sue, I wrote an essay on their computer titled, "Children and Parents," about the problems adoptive parents face with orphans and what they need to think about in dealing with those issues. One of Pastor Gary Inrig's sermons at Trinity Church was on the topic of Gifts of Parents to their Children. I was deeply touched by this sermon, obtained a cassette tape of it and incorporated Gary's outline with the scriptures in my essay. In 1999, in St. Petersburg, I had opportunity to give a presentation to our adult Sunday school class based on my essay.



Speaking to Russian orphan boys (2 back row; 2 in right front) in family home at ATIA Center in Moscow

Everyone in the class, including myself, was moved to tears.

Sue returned again to St. Petersburg in 1997 and in 1998, and I again I was able to assist her with her work there. Rich and Sue have a website for their business at www.suegregg.com. Click on Teaching on their Directory, then on Internships, and you will find a description and some photos of my internship with Sue plus a photo of my Russian Beet Salad. Click also on Baked Parmesan Chicken under Cook-books - Main Dishes to see one of the many dinners I

prepared.

My Life & Work in Russia Today



Assisting Sue's demonstration at first Moscow Bible Church Women's Conference

Since I have returned to Russia from America in September, 1997, my life has been a series of faith tests. I comfort myself that God wastes nothing in our lives, that we learn significant lessons through suffering, and that he can be trusted to sovereignly direct and protect our lives.

Life in Russia is not easy, but the position of an adult orphan is especially difficult. Finding income producing employment to support oneself is a daunting task for most Russians, especially since the fall of the ruble in value in August, 1998. One may or may not get paid, or paid adequately, even if he has a job. In 1999, I worked for a visa company for 7 months which promised pay of \$70 monthly (the cost of my apartment rental). I was paid for the first month \$60. Incredibly, knowing that I had some savings, my boss asked to borrow from me what was, for me, a large sum of money to invest in the business. In America, for an employer to request money from an employee is unthinkable, but in Russia it is not unusual. Employees, hoping to keep in favor on their job, will often do this. I unwisely did so without obtaining any written agree-



Making Blini (Crepes) for 50 at Moscow Bible Church

ment. Over the next six months I had declining hope of ever seeing my money again and was treated poorly. But I was determined to stay with this job until I was paid back, even though I worked many times 50 hours a week without pay. Finally, through much prayer, Melana's confronting my boss on my behalf, and God's sovereign mercy, I was paid back what I loaned without interest. I learned the very difficult lesson never to do that again. I never did get paid for the six months of back wages, however. Interestingly, the day after I received back the money I had loaned this company, my employer discovered that her company had been defrauded by another foreign company they had been working closely with.

God has gifted me with gab and facility with the English language. This has afforded me a wide variety of opportunities to act as an interpreter, translator, traveling companion and tour guide. The pay is low and on an informal basis because I have not been professionally trained. Also, as a Christian, I frequently accept volunteer jobs. Yet God keeps bringing me a variety of opportunities to keep food in my stomach, a roof over my head and clothes on my back, although meeting dental and health expenses continues to be problematic. Through these opportunities I have continued to gain experience that will contribute to my preparation to



Delivering clothing and other items to orphanage



Extending Love & Friendship

reach my future dream, and I continue to seek God's way for me back to America for more promising education and experience.

In 1997 and 1998, I was employed by Sue Gregg for several weeks as tour guide and helper in St. Petersburg and Moscow. An important experience with Sue in 1997 was accompanying her to the orphanage complex established in Moscow and operated by the Advanced Training Institute of America (established by Bill Gothard of the Institute of Basic Life Principles based in Oakbrook, Illinois). Sue wanted to visit their work in Moscow because, in 1995, she and Rich had conducted a Food and Hospitality Conference at the headquarters in

Oakbrook. The conference was video taped for an 18-week food and hospitality course which Sue designed for ATIA homeschooling families. I was deeply touched and influenced by our visit there. The

complex housed forty five orphans with nine resident homeschooling ATIA American families plus a large staff and a Russian high school that incorporates biblical life principles as part of the curriculum. In the main administrative building, apartments for the families had been completely and beautifully renovated. The orphans were divided up among the nine families to live in the apartments with them and their own children. They were part of these families and homeschooled along with their own children. Sue and I were invited by one of the families into their apartment where we met their own children and their 4 Russian orphan sons. I was invited to speak to the entire

family and all the children. I was invited to share what my main advice would be to the orphans besides

that they needed to know God, and Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. I told them that they needed to apply themselves while they had this great opportunity in such an orphanage to accept all the love and care they were given, with gratitude, and to learn everything that they could, because when they were grown and would leave the orphanage, they would have to take full responsibility to care for themselves

In 1999, I helped Joyce Bourcier, now a missionary with Evangelical Free Church of America in Moscow, to celebrate her 50th birthday complete with banquet style food for twenty-one guests. For appetizers I prepared vegetable kabobs with cherry tomatoes, cauliflower, red bell peppers and carrots, and cheese ball with crackers, followed by salad with poppy seed dressing. Later I served them wild rice with homemade dinner rolls, then the main course of Boeef Chandlier and Cheese Scalloped Potatoes (recipes Sue taught me from her cookbooks). After a one hour break I served them desserts such as chocolate cheese cake, creme brulee and chocolate fudge cookies (not from Sue's cookbooks!). Out of twenty-one persons there were four Russians who were not Christians, so it was a very special opportunity for us to share with them the love of God



Teamwork for Vacation Bible

and become fruitful, God-honoring human beings. I saw on that day how important a family context is for the well-being of orphans in their childhood. This has become an important part of my dream for a model Russian orphanage.

In 1998, I again accompanied Sue to Moscow where she had been invited for the second time to give a formal food and nutrition presentation with a gospel message at the Moscow Bible Church. In 1997, she had been the speaker for the first Moscow Bible Church Women's Conference with sixty Russian ladies. On this trip she spoke to a mixed group for a summer outreach evening, demonstrating fruit crepes (blini, in Russia). It was my task on that day to make the 50 whole grain crepes to be served that evening. What should have been a two hour project, turned out to be an all day project on a Russian stove. Sue is still working on making a Russian stove and whole grain crepes compatible.

Vacation Bible School Crafts

and what he can do for you when you ask him to come into your heart as Savior. I was also able to help Joyce with some of her computer files which was very rewarding for me, as well.

In summer of 1999, Sherry Oxendine brought a team of 6 Americans and 3 Russians to my orphanage to renovate one side of the fourth floor with its 34 rooms and I was able to assist with long hard hours of work. From 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. daily for two weeks, we renovated everything: ceilings, walls, windows,

change of broken glass in light bulbs, plumbing and electricity. We painted the walls and windows, put up decorative borders, and changed the toilet bowls in the bathrooms. We then concluded with a visit to each completed room, praying for the children living there and putting Bible story pictures on the walls to make some impact and difference in their lives. We also renovated the principal's office. It was one of the most rewarding projects, but the work was too much and time too limited for our small team, so Sherry hired another 16 Russian helpers.

Several times I have worked with the Buckner Organization that has come to Russia from Texas to work with the orphanages. I worked with them two weeks for the first time in November, 1999, from December on a longer term project, and again in March and in May of 2000.

While I was working with them in November, the Lord especially blessed me through Henry and Maggie Hill, Gillian, Betty Johnson, Tom and Margaret Stone, Debbie McLeod-Sears, and Becky and Amy Norton. I am thankful for their love, heart for orphans, heart for me, care, attention, encouragement, support and will. They helped me to draw closer to God by helping me to realize how important it is that I forgive my birth mom from my heart and not to be bitter. They have such a deep interest in this country and in helping the orphanages. I am praying for this team and ask the Lord to bless and reward the Buckner team richly for their ministry in Russia.



Church of the Saviour-on-the Spilt Blood

From December, I worked with Lena through the Buckner Organization to visit and to bring assistance to the orphanages. First, we would visit an orphanage and discuss with the principal what the felt needs were. Following this visit, we would explain through letters to our friends, churches, and the Buckner group what those needs were and asked for funds. When we received funds we would shop for the items, deliver them to the orphanage, and try to spend some time with the children, playing games and getting to know them. Then we would find out their personal needs such as needs for glasses, medications, and clothes, etc. We then would look for more

funds to purchase them. At one of the orphanages we taught the children how to cook simple foods almost every Saturday. When it was ready we would sit with them and have a meal. Then we played games, talked about their future, needs, and watched them dancing, sewing and welding, etc. Sometimes we would play outdoor games or spend their holidays with them for fun and companionship.



With Sabra, working with team of 70 from Little Rock, Arkansas

In May, the Buckner group returned to St. Petersburg and I was able to work with them again, this time conducting a Vacation Bible School for Orphanage #40. We were a team of 18 Russians and 18 Americans. The VBS consisted of craft,

memory verse, story and recreation for visually impaired 3 to 7 year olds. I loved it, working prima-

rily with the recreational team. It was hard work with the little children, but very rewarding and the first time I was involved in that type of an outreach. The purpose was to teach the children 4 things: God made me special, Jesus loves me, the Bible is a treasure map, and Jesus died for me.

Often, opportunities arise to take more private groups on tour in the city, such as the American family who came from Moscow for two days. To conclude our tour, I took them to my orphanage where I grew up. It was their first time to visit a Russian orphanage. They



With the babies at Orphanage #8

were so touched by it that they donated \$100 so that I could buy some slippers and underwear for boys for the summer. Such

happenings in my life remind me continually that God is at work in my life and is using me to touch the lives of others.

In June, a team came from Little Rock, Arkansas to St. Petersburg. I want to describe in more detail the events that took place while I worked with this group for a week. The group of 70 was divided into teams of 12. Our group included both adults and teenagers and was assigned with leader, Bill Fisher-

man, to work with the pediatric hospital/academy. Our schedule of such activities as Bible stories, crafts, games, personal time, etc., included two hours in the morning, then a break for lunch followed by two more

hours in the afternoon. It was hard, but rewarding work. On Monday, however, the hospital was closed for visitors so we decided that we would evangelize on the streets of the city. It was time for lunch on Monday by the time we

arrived downtown, so we went to a very nice cafe called "Laima." After lunch, as we all were sitting downstairs of the cafe talking about how we could distribute the team members' testimonies, some booklets and Bibles that they had brought from the states, a grandmother came to us and wanted to know why we were smiling without any reason. Sabra said, "Well, I have something good to tell you." Then she told grandma that we were visiting Russia from the states and were bringing good news about God. We talked a little bit about life and her life situation. Then we offered her some booklets and testimonies. I asked her if she had a Bible and, if not, would she like to have one. She said, "Yes." We also gave her some extra booklets, testimonies and Bibles to share with her friends. It was an encouraging sign for our ministry for this day.

We then decided to go to "Dom Knigi," which is the largest bookstore in St. Petersburg. We split into two groups, one at the entrance and the other at the exit. We gave booklets and testimonies to people. Everything was going well until one lady came in, took a look at what we had to offer, and said, "Oh, you are Christians and you have no right to be in here

and do this.” She then went to the security officer and administrator where I overheard her reporting to them, so I said that we should leave. We headed toward The Church of the Saviour-on-the-Spilt-Blood (or The Church of the Resurrection of Christ). On our way we gave out our testimonies and booklets, and Bibles to those who wanted them. We tried to go to the park and sing some songs, but it started to rain so hard that we had to cancel that. We stood under the roof of The Church of the Saviour-on-the-Spilt-Blood where I saw my friends from Dallas, TX with the Buckner organization. They had come into the city to do some construction for Orphanage #16 and out in the suburb. When it stopped raining for a while, we decided to go shopping since the souvenir fair was close by. The team just loved it and didn’t want to stop, but it was getting cold and started raining again. We didn’t want anyone to get sick on our team, so we decided to go inside to the largest department store called “Gostiniy.” We stayed there for a while until I took them to the restaurant for dinner.

We went to the hospital on Tuesday for the first time. It is the largest hospital in Russia where any kind of illness can be treated. Twenty eight different medical departments deal with 28 different types of illness, serving over 800 patients. Patients are brought to this hospital from all over Russia. Nina, the head doctor of the hospital, explained a bit of the history of the hospital to us and its difficulties and how the hospital’s needs have been met in the last eight years through help from the U.S. government and others. Following this introductory orientation to the hospital, we went to the department for the surgery where there were over 100 children. We dramatized the “Birth of Jesus” for them and they just loved it. Then we passed out to them some coloring books with markers and crayons. We then moved from room to room, visiting those children who couldn’t move at all, either because they just had surgery or had some other problem. While getting acquainted with them, we gave each one a Bible, candy, crayon box and marker. In the afternoon we came back to the same hospital building, but on the other side where we had 15 children and 4 adults. We

dramatized the same story and again the kids loved it. Then we changed our craft theme to making their own Bible covers. It was one of the best of all. We had so many people wanting to make a Bible cover that even the nurses joined us and made some for themselves, which was a blessing. We got to know some children and some of them were in very bad health condition. Pray for them as you read this story.

On the next day we visited the same hospital building in the afternoon, but decided to work with the same group of children in order to develop a closer relationship and friendship with them. We told them the story of the life of Moses and the Ten Commandants. Following the Bible story we had craft time making bookmarkers for the Bibles that they received from us the previous day, and some painted on chalkboards. Most of the people enjoyed doing the bookmarkers, while a few enjoyed painting on chalkboard. We also had some new children. One of them was

I shared some scripture verses with him and asked him if he wanted to invite Jesus into his life. He said yes. . .

thirteen year old Lenaya. He had lost one of his legs jumping from moving train to moving train as he was running way from home. Although his father was dead, he

did not obey his mother. Now Lenaya needs a prosthesis for his leg. A very simple and cheap one will cost \$2,000, which he and his mother do not have. If you know someone who can help it would be great. Let me know. He also has a friend whose name is Dima who lost a hand in the same way like his friend.

In the morning on the fourth day, we spent some time with the same hospital group. Our story was about the Samaritan woman. In the afternoon, we were sent to a different department, which was a micro-neurology eye surgery clinic designed by a very well known doctor, Mr. Fedorov. Sadly, Mr. Fedorov was killed in a helicopter crash three weeks ago when he was returning to his clinic in Moscow. He is the first person who had ever designed the crystal system and micro-neurology eye surgery. There were 90 children there. We shared with them our Bible story and our teenagers sang a song for them about how your life can change or be different through Jesus. The children loved that song very much. Then we

took Polaroid pictures of them and the girls taught them how to make photo frames for their pictures. After that we gave them little gifts, Bibles, booklets and testimonies, and many of them exchanged their addresses. We also met Galia, age seven. Galia's mom died when she was having another baby and her father deserted to another family. Now she lives with her grandparents, but soon she might end up in the orphanage, because of finances and many other reasons. She is so precious and it breaks my heart. We tried to get to know her and decided that we would buy her some clothes and bring them to her on Sunday.

The next morning, we visited Orphanage #8 for infants to three years of age with psychological and neurological problems. On our way there, we shopped for 250 diapers, baby powder, oil, shampoo. etc. to deliver to them. I wish we could have purchased more dippers, which are greatly needed, but we bought the last available in the store. When we arrived at the orphanage we took a little tour. I had actually been there before with the Buckner Organization. It is one of the nicest and most nourishing orphanages in the city. The city government doesn't really support them that much so they have to rely on their sponsors and other private supporters. They have a good sponsor who helps them from time to time, but it is a big complex with a massage room, bathroom, swimming pool and special psychological and neurological baths to calm down the nervous system. The orphanage also has a new PE room which looks awesome. At the conclusion of the tour we were allowed to spend some time with the children, playing with them before their nap time for about an hour. I enjoyed every moment



We want them to survive and make it through this life and be successful

of it and was deeply touched by it. I attempted to get some information on the life conditions of some of the children. There is one boy who is perfectly healthy, but his mother is a prostitute. She comes to visit her son once a day, four times a week, but doesn't want to take the child home. She has made her decision to leave her precious baby in the orphanage because she is going to Italy to work for a long time as a prostitute. When I heard about this, it just broke my heart and I cried. I just don't understand how a mother can come and see her child, but not love him and how it doesn't hurt her heart. It was the first time that I couldn't control myself. I cried right on the street. I know that there is no one to help him and now he is one of those 14,000 orphans in the city of St. Petersburg. I asked the Lord, "Why, Jesus, do people do that???" When we left this orphanage we returned to the hospital to say goodbye because it was our last day to visit there. We took some pictures and gave them gifts.

On Friday evening about 200 of us gathered for a worship service in the Southern Russian Baptist Church, the largest church in the city. The Baptist church from Little Rock had brought their choir to sing in the church. The service was awesome and I would say the best I have ever attended in my life. All of us (Americans included) cried because it was so powerful. I especially loved Molly's translating into sign language the song written by Ray Boltz, "Thank you for Giving to the Lord". We just cried and cried. God's Spirit was with us on this evening. At the end of the service, Stanley, the mission pastor for the group, said that it was the best worship service he ever had in his life and he is almost 50 years old. Then the Russian pastor stood up and said the same thing. It was so touching for all of us.

The final two days, I took my team shopping and sightseeing. I cannot explain the full meaning of the experience serving with this team in St. Petersburg. God truly was with us for the entire time. We

felt His presence and His Spirit too. I thank God for that wonderful opportunity that I had to work with this wonderful group of Christian people from Little Rock, AR.

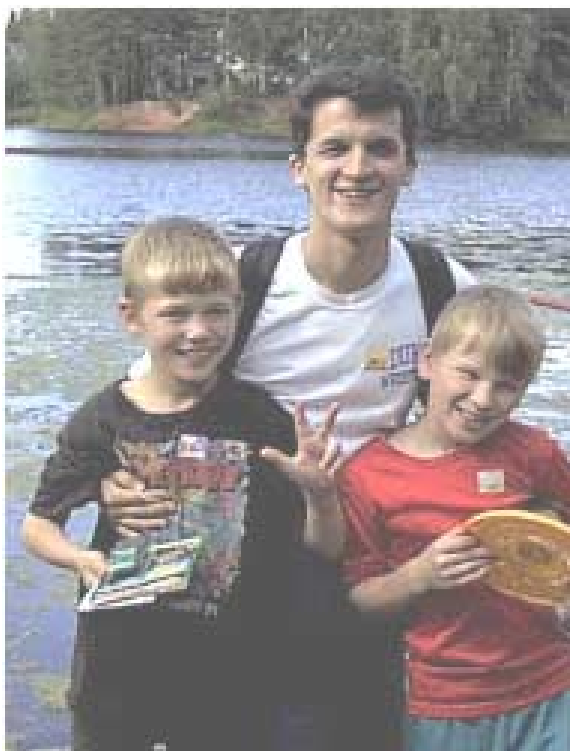
Shortly after the Little Rock team returned to the states, I began working with Sherry Oxindine in St. Petersburg for a few weeks. One June evening

just as we were about to eat dinner, Sherry's husband Jim came in and suddenly requested me to go outside with him. He had encountered a homeless boy of about 14 injured in the street. Two months earlier someone had pushed him onto the railroad into the path of an oncoming electrical train, injuring his foot and cutting off his toes. He had come to St. Petersburg with his mother after they had been kicked out of their apartment when they could not pay the rent. Jim told the boy that he wanted to pray for him and that he believed that the Lord wanted to heal him. We prayed with him and I translated. Then Jim told me that he wanted me to go back and talk to the boy about receiving the Lord

into his heart. It was the first time that I shared my testimony with someone on the street. I told Maksim about my life and especially what happened to me when I was adopted and about being an orphan. He began to cry. I hugged him and felt that the time was right to talk to him about the Lord. I shared some scripture verses with him and asked him if he wanted to invite Jesus into his life. He said yes, so we prayed and he repeated after me. We then arranged to bring him some clothes the next evening, but he did not show up. Pray for Maksim.

Mark and Melinda Cathey, with CRM (Church Resource Ministries), in St. Petersburg for the past

eight years, have been great encouragement to me. Melinda has had a heart for older orphans, especially those who have just begun their adult lives outside the orphanage. We want them to survive and succeed in life with meaning and purpose. Together we visited Orphanage #46, which has a very good record re: survival and successes of orphans after they leave school. We have been working on locating and purchase a building that would allow us to bring orphans who don't have a place to live and want to have a goal for life and make a success of it. We would like to provide them a place to live where they would have their own nice room, bathroom, kitchen, etc. It would be like a little apartment where they could experience successful apartment living. We envision a day care center, cooking and sewing classes, Bible classes, chapel, and a social development department that would help them to get into a good school and find a job, teach them how to pay bills, etc. This is what Melinda and I have been working on lately. Now we are looking for someone who can help with the finance to purchase and renovate a building for it (see page 27 for a more complete story of this venture).



My dream is to provide much more knowledge, experience, and godly values than is received through the typical Russian educational system for orphans

Mark and Melinda have listened to my dream and my heart and, as a result, encouraged me to write this story. They have given me their love, heart, care, hospitality, attention, food, house, and shared their washing machine with me to do my laundry. I am thankful for their heart to work in and help the orphanages in the city. They have also helped me financially which has been very important to me. I have also enjoyed spending time with their children. I have greatly appreciated their prayer support and spiritual training. Through relatives, they have been seeking to assist me to find a way for schooling in America. It is my plan to use the skills and training that God has already given me to work toward my educational goals. One

means by which I can do this is to offer my personal chef service and household assistance, including working with children, in exchange for food and lodging in the states. During this time I would be seeking sponsorship for the pursuit of my education.

God took me from the “ash heap” of parental abandonment and the trials of the Russian orphanage system. He saved me from my sin and aloneness. He gave me himself as my Father and gave me a family to call my own, to love and help me grow up so that I may become a godly and productive Christ follower. He has put a dream in my heart and I would like to share it with you.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James 1:27

My Future Dream and Vision

My future dream is to open my own Christian private orphanage in Russia in the region of St. Petersburg. I desire to build on my own private property in order to insure ownership and control once it is established. Having grown up in the orphanages I know exactly what needs to be changed, added, or taken away from the style and system of the Russian orphanage. My hope is to provide a role model for other Russian orphanages, especially in St. Petersburg. I would include thirty minutes of morning chapel for children to attend before school to worship, pray and discuss how to seek the Lord in their lives and for that day, and to encourage and comfort one another in the love of Christ which is a deep need of orphans. The school would be on the campus so the children would not be

required to commute elsewhere in the city. As much protection as possible from the social ills of city, country, and the world system would be provided and especially from those habits orphans are especially prone to engage in such as a sense of purposelessness, smoking, alcohol, drugs, abuse of younger orphans by older children, bad language, and loose living .

The school would have Russian and English speaking teachers who have special training for working with orphans, who are motivated by their



I know that my vision for a model Russian orphanage is an ambitious and complex undertaking and will require much wisdom and skill, hard work and considerable time, and much reshaping, but the Lord is awesome and great. He will guide me each step of the way and accomplish His purpose and plan.

Alex, Year 2000

love for children and not by monetary gain and who are willing to work hard and long hours. If such quality teachers and house parents cannot be found, I would develop my own training program which they would be required to take before working in my orphanage. In addition to the normally required subjects, the school would have a computer lab that is needed very much in every orphanage in the city, and classes in dancing, sewing, cooking, art, photography, workshop, and other practical skills, plus Bible study classes. Children would learn the value of these classes for their well-being, for exploring their God-given giftedness, talents and interests, and for broadening their job opportunities and service to society when they leave the orphanage. Many orphans

mistakenly believe that life outside the orphanage is the same as in the orphanage where they are protected and provided for. They begin to think that the government will support and provide them daily with food, clothes and education for the rest of their lives, but as we know this is not the case. This kind of thinking destroys their lives, because living on their own is not what they expected. Since they have not learned appropriate expectations for independent adult responsibilities or ways to meet them, they make some very serious and dangerous decisions in their lives such as committing suicide, killing, raping, or robbing places of business or persons on the streets. Young men are most prone to engage in such destructive behavior, but young women also engage in these habits. Prostitution is especially a problem among the young women. They end up bearing children at a very young age with no husband. When they realize that there is no way for them to raise this child they commit the same sin that their parents committed twenty years ago. My goal is to change orphans' lives, preparing them to become responsible and healthy adults who can take care of themselves constructively in adulthood and to contribute to the society in which they live. They will have the Lord in their hearts and their life will be different compared to any other children in Russia. They would be able to take care of themselves and have a wealth of knowledge and training to help them which they have acquired over the years living in the orphanage.

There are many other things that I have in mind that I would like to do in the orphanage such as teaching orphans how to earn and spend their own personal money wisely, which they do not now learn. Also I want them to learn Biblical standards regarding sexual behavior. They must learn the importance

of these standards not only for healthy human relationships and family stability, but also the value of these standards in protecting their health, especially against AIDS. I also want them to learn what to eat and how to prepare health-giving food like I learned for six months from my mom, Sue, in California. Someday I would like to attend a professional chef training school in the USA, so that I can personally teach them how to prepare excellent food and what food is all about in our lives.

I believe it is important to teach orphans how to take care of each other and themselves, because no one else will do that for them besides God and themselves. They must also learn how to work and what it is to work hard and trustworthily. Thus, greater opportunities for constructive and profitable employment will open for them when they leave the orphan-

age. My dream is to provide much more knowledge, experience, and godly values than is received through the typical Russian educational system for orphans. Special permission from the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation for a license will be required in order to have my own school that will be accredited

and equivalent to a normal school like others. I recognize that my dream cannot be developed quickly or the style and system of Russian orphanages changed overnight since the current pattern has been established for many years. Nothing besides God, time, and a role model of a special kind of homestyle and a family orphanage will change it over the years.

Preparing to Reach My Vision

I need a lot of experience and education to fulfill my dream. I have tested the Russian waters and found them wanting. God has put in my heart an intense and unrelenting desire to return to America to prepare for my future goal and make it the home base from which I can develop my vision. I believe my best options are available in the United States and that is the reason God has put America so strongly on my

All orphans need hope, purpose and quality relationships in their lives. Many recognize they do not have it. I want the quality of my own life, which the Lord has given me, to count for blessing in their lives as well as it counts for my own.

heart. The options that especially interest me include professional chef training at one of the excellent chef training schools in America, a hotel management program, and obtaining a business degree in International Business. That will allow me to work internationally and especially with Russia and help me to keep constantly in touch with Russia. Then I want to establish employment to raise my own funds without being dependent on anyone, and/or in partnership with people who want to share in my dream, as God directs.

It is my desire to become a U.S. citizen to give me the freedom I feel I would need from dependency on the Russian government to carry out my mission. As a Russian citizen the problems and difficulties could prevent this project from coming to fruit in Russia. There is much more freedom to travel in and out of Russia as a U.S. citizen than as a Russian citizen. I anticipate this kind of back and forth travel as a necessity in the kind of work I want to accomplish. To find the resources and support for it in Russia alone would be unrealistic, at least at this present time and near future.

I know that my vision for a model Russian orphanage is an ambitious and complex undertaking and will require much wisdom and skill, hard work and considerable time, and much reshaping, but the Lord is awesome and great. He will guide me each step of the way and accomplish his purpose and plan. It might take longer than I think it will, but it is never too late to set high goals and work for them by faith. I believe the Lord put this on my heart for a special purpose and reason. Also what I have gone through as a Russian orphan is a testimony not to give up, but continue to trust the Lord and see what he does in regard to my life and goal. If He has brought me this far in my life, which is evident from my story, He will complete the work in my life that He has begun.

I believe that God has given me many things to share with Russian orphans about what He has done in my life and will continue to do for me. That will encourage them to seek God and consider more seriously about what they could do constructively with their lives. I have hope and purpose for my

life that God has given me. All orphans need hope, purpose and quality relationships in their lives. Many recognize they do not have it. I want the quality of my own life, which the Lord has given me, to count for blessing in their lives as well as it counts for my own.

I have written about my life, my heart, and my vision for future ministry with Russian orphans. I am now seeking persons in whose hearts God would put a desire to help me fulfil my vision. I have many needs. My sole earthly family is the family of God. If God moves you to consider helping me in any way, you may contact me through Sue Gregg. This is not the primary purpose of my story, however, but to inform my friends and Christian family more accurately about the condition of orphans in Russia and what kind of influence caring believers can have in their lives, plus my own vision to bring a fuller measure of God's goodness to them.

July 2001 ~ The Harbor

Beginning in 1998, I felt called to work on my own with orphans in several orphanages. After a few months, I began to encounter individuals and organizations that have compassion for St. Petersburg orphans. One of them was Melinda Cathey. Mark and Melinda Cathey and their children have been in Russia for 9 years. Catheys are part of Church Resource Ministry Mission. All 9 years Melinda Cathey felt like she had something special she could offer and help with so when I met her she saw her call. She was interested in visiting orphanages so I took her to some of the orphanages in the city. We helped some of them buying clothes and other necessary things. The more we worked the more we realized that the need was far beyond and more serious than just buying clothes and other things. We realized that graduate orphans at age 16-20 when they leave an orphanage have no support. There is no transitional phase that helps them to be self-sufficient and self-supported and productive citizens. Consequently, 90% within the first five years become either criminals, prostitutes, homeless, in prison or commit suicide. So Melinda and I developed a vision for "The Harbor".

“The Harbor” 2005 Update

Today, there are more orphans and street children living in Russia than there were following in the aftermath of W.W.II. Based on the St. Petersburg Governor’s report, 40,000 street children live in the city and the surrounding area. St. Petersburg, alone, has approximately 40 orphanages in the city and there are another 60 in the suburbs of St. Petersburg. Each orphanage accommodates approximately 100 children. There are about 20 government and 10 private shelters housing street children.

Young Adults-at-Risk

At 17-18 years of age, Russian orphans are turned out into society and must find their own way to make it in life. Most do not. Ninety percent of graduate orphans end up as alcoholics, criminals or prostitutes. Many end up in prison and a large number end up committing suicide. In President Putin’s own words, “A national crisis exists and we must make the orphan problem priority #1.”

The Harbor IS “priority #1.”

Our Goal

Our goal is to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of children; provide job skills and placement; hire Christian staff that mentor and impart hope through Christ; and serve as a new model of care for graduate orphans and street children.

Our Mission

The Harbor’s mission is to holistically prepare orphans for integration into society.

During a two-year program orphans who have “graduated” from orphanages are mentored by trained and experienced Russian Christian staff in the areas of: life-skills, vocational training, education, psychological care and spiritual development.

The Harbor’s belief is that a fully prepared life is most effectively achieved in the context of a supportive family environment, as opposed to a classroom. Therefore, the orphans who are selected from among the orphanages come to live among the staff in family units, where modeling can occur and lessons are caught as well as taught.

Mentors help graduate orphans become productive and successful citizens. They also act as advocates for them in acquiring housing and employment.

In contrast to other orphan ministries, The Harbor is a live-in residential care program with a high staff to orphan ratio. Informal family environment and mentoring are emphasized over formal teaching and information giving; change via a relationship vs. change via a classroom.

The Harbor’s two-year goals and program:

- Employ Christians who mentor and impart hope in Christ
- Meet both physical and spiritual needs of orphans
- Provide job skills and placement
- Create business venues
- Serve as a new model of care for graduate orphans for all of Russia

The Harbor’s vision is to expand the current operations to include 40-50 graduate orphans over the next five-year period. In addition, we have already begun to develop a center to train leaders from other regions of Russia and her former republics in this model of orphan integration.

Response from the West:

The West has responded to this situation generously. Food, clothing, medical supplies, toys, and volunteers to help upgrade facilities are flowing into the city on a regular basis. However, none of this seems to be making a difference in the final analysis. Additionally, none of the current help has addressed the problems of corruption and lack of training within the system.

Success and Failure Stories:

In 1995, a group of 16 orphans graduated from one of the city orphanages. Most of them were not quite sure what they were going to do, where they would live and what was going to happen to them.

However, four out of 16 knew exactly what they wanted

and began their future careers. One went to a technical school, another went to a medical school, another finished high school and later went to the university, and the last decided to study abroad to get training in several different fields. All four of them have been very successful.

The technician married and has a baby and a good family now. The medical student became a head nurse and works in a clinic. She also gives private massage therapies for an extra income. The one who finished high school has steady work now and lives an independent life. The one who was abroad is back now. He learned many new skills that allow him to draw from several sources of income. He learned a foreign language on his own, which allowed him to find a job as a translator; learned the history of his country so well that it has allowed him to be a tour-guide; and he was trained to work as a personal chef. He now works with the orphanages in the city; helping other orphans who would like to have a chance to survive and be successful. He is the current Director of Development and Public Relations for the Harbor.

The other 14 graduate orphans did not fair so well. Some fell into crime or prostitution and some ended up homeless.

Four boys went to the Metro school to be drivers. They finished their education, but unfortunately, they never did work as drivers, and thus wasted the time they spent in school. One boy decided that it would be better for him to serve in the Russian military, but was not sure what he would do afterwards. Another one became an alcoholic and two others became drug addicts. Two of the boys changed their sexual orientation as well, which is quite common.

Two girls went to study at the cooking school to be chefs. Two became prostitutes and live on the streets. Two other girls work occasionally, but are very lazy. Two graduate orphans died after being on their own for six years. The others have simply disappeared and have not been heard from.

The Harbor... is changing Russia one life at a time.

Two years ago, the Harbor was approved by the Russian Department of Justice as an independent St. Petersburg Charitable Organization, "The Harbor".

The Harbor has received official recognition from the Department of Education to exist and work with the graduate orphans that are forced to leave the orphanages due to their age (17-18 years old). This was a major achievement as it gives us full freedom to work with all existing orphanages. Though orphanage directors were very excited about our program they were unable to officially give us "their" orphans until we had received this official government recognition. In addition, our Public Relations Director, Alex Krutov, has long-standing relationships with many of the orphanage directors due to his extensive ministry within their orphanages for the past 5 years. This allows us to easily locate future participants for the Harbor as we have personal relationships already built with them. Presently the orphanage directors are thrilled about our existence and are willing to partner with us. We have unique credibility and trust from these directors since all staff is Russian. This places us as the only ministry of this kind in the city now where Russians are serving their own. We are very proud of our place in empowering Russians to serve their own people.

Another unique facet of The Harbor is that we are a residential care program. A few other day programs exist, but there is no other residential program that emphasizes the power of relationships and modeling to bring about long-term change in another's life. This truth is evident even for those of us who grew up in the context of a loving, nurturing family, and is intensified many times over for those orphans who grew up without these things. That is why the Harbor, where the orphans live in close-knit family units is so powerful.

We are blessed to have access to the St. Petersburg Christian University, the second largest evangelical university in Russia. We have close ties with many of the SPCU teaching and administrative staff. They serve as an incredible funnel; channeling the best of their students to us for our staff.

Our Program:

1. Establishing a new model of transitional childcare; helping orphans who must leave an orphanage due to their age, to integrate successfully into mainstream life.
2. Establishing a new model that provides not only material care, but also one that addresses the

holistic needs of children (emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, and physical health).

3. Establishing a new model that assures an adequate level of education and training/job skills, and allows for realistic job placement.
4. Establishing a new model with highly trained and effective staff who believe that there is hope for the orphans and that orphans are created with dignity, potential, and purpose.
5. Establishing a new model whereby staff serves not only as workers, but also as mentors who nurture, guide, and advocate for these children.
6. Establishing a new model that will serve as an example to ALL of St. Petersburg; a model that demonstrates what is possible in childcare—beyond the current norm.
7. Establishing a new model that empowers the Russians to staff and manage such a project long-term.

The Harbor Vision

Our vision is to select 40-50 participants within a five-year period and put them through a two-year Transitional Integration Program. This program includes a whole host of life, family, and job skills training. The goal is to give the participants the life skills, vocational skills, and relational skills required to be successful and independent citizens. All of these skills are taught in the context of a Christian worldview. It is our deep desire to help all participants develop a personal relationship with the Creator and Lover of their souls, Jesus Christ.

In addition to these skills, the staff will act as advocates for the participants in their job placement and housing. A new group of participants is selected according to clear criteria every two years. Graduating participants are followed-up with post program evaluations for the next five years.

Our Current Facilities:

In May 2004, we purchased our first apartment. The apartment has five rooms accommodating eight full-time girls. Before we purchased the apartment, we rented it out for a year. Prior to moving into the apartment, the

girls had to do some renovating. Through renovating, the girls gained knowledge and experience in how to fix up an apartment and design their own rooms. The Harbor's goal is to recruit a team of volunteers that will travel to Russia and help remodel the girl's apartment to make it more comfortable.

We are renting three other apartments. In one apartment, we house eight full-time boys. The Harbor's goal is to purchase an apartment for the boys to bring more stability to the ministry.

In another apartment, we have our vocational center and office. At the vocational center, we teach participants computer skills, English, sewing, counseling, tutoring, etc.

The final apartment we rented out to some of our graduates for one year during the follow-up period.

Sept./Oct. 2005 - Update on the Harbor

On August 25, the Harbor graduated 12 new participants, the second class in four years.. They have gained knowledge, strength, and wisdom. Many of them became believers. Now they are capable of holding a job and paying the bills. They improved their communication skills, and learned English and computer skills. Now they are ready to live an independent and successful life.

Here is a brief update on where our graduates are now:

Sasha: Wonderful with his hands and making wood furniture. His heart's desire is to study social work and one day serve as a mentor to Harbor boys. Presently, he helps his church with their sports ministry, as well as their ministry to widows. He is currently looking for a job and will continue in his studies this next year.

Yuri: Cheated out of his communal, government room. He is working for Pepsi Cola in their computer department. He is a hard worker and appears to have a good future there. He deeply loves the Lord.

Gosha: Studying to be a shoe maker. His dream is to go to Bible school and open his own cobbler business. He will be staying with the program one more year while we act as an advocate for his government room in a communal apartment. He will also continue his studies. Gosha has made the most profound changes.

Sasha: Finished a technical degree in carpentry, but is currently working as a dish washer and a delivery boy for a café. He is living successfully in his government room and comes back to see us often.

Andre: Found a job in a restaurant while he finishes his education. He loves computers, is very good with them and wants to work in this field. He is living on his own and involved in the follow-up program.

Nastya: Doing very well in nursing studies. She has one more year of nursing school and is contemplating going on to medical school to become a pediatrician. She has made profound changes this year, especially in her ability to relate to others and to become responsible for her actions.

Nastya: Graduated from high school this year and is trying to get into a fashion design college. She is an amazing seamstress, who has won regional competitions for her traditional costumes. She dreams of becoming a wedding planner. She has a deep hunger for the Lord and is growing rapidly.

Oksana: Studying to be a seamstress with one more year of technical college. She is saddled with many health problems, but is learning how to take care of herself so as to minimize these. She has grown much this year, but is not yet able to trust Jesus.

Sasha: Graduated from a technical college with a specialty in wood art. Her desire is to become a social worker and is currently studying for college placement exams. She is self-motivated in her walk with the Lord and loves His word. She got baptized this summer!

Lena: Studying to become a landscape architect. She has one more year of studies left before finding a job in this field that she loves. She is full of life and curiosity. Her new found relationship with Jesus is blossoming.

Nastya: Finished technical school as a seamstress and is working as such. She is living successfully on her own but struggles with her choice of friends. She has claimed to have made a decision for Christ.

Masha: Self-motivated and now in her last year of studying to become an accountant. She moved out of the Harbor to live with and take care of her elderly grandmother and is doing well. She visits very often.

The Harbor has already located 16 new participants for the next two years. We are still looking for four more participants that will be a part of the Harbor ministry. This summer we have moved the boys' apartment to the same city area, so now we are together and do not have to go across the city.

We are sincerely grateful for your ongoing support. May the Lord richly and abundantly bless you. Since the Harbor is growing up to 20 participants for the next two years, our budget is growing as well. Thus, we need more funding for the operational expenses. We are asking you for your continuous monthly support so that we can make the difference in the lives of many orphans.

A Fundraising Opportunity through *World Magazine*

In 2005, the Harbor received a donation check for \$500 from *World Magazine*. How did it happen? *World Magazine* subscriptions are structured to facilitate the support of selected Christian ministries. Through one of our Harbor supporters, the Harbor was selected. Your subscription can now contribute support to the Harbor. For a "one-year" 50-issue subscription, *World Magazine* will donate \$20 to the Harbor; for "six month" 25-issue subscription, \$10 will go to the Harbor. To subscribe, click on the link below and follow directions, designating the Harbor as the recipient of your subscription donation.

<https://www.worldmag.com/subscribe/fundraising.cfm>.

World Magazine will be delivered directly to your home or office, plus you will get free access to *WORLDMag.com* for the length of your subscription. If you need help to subscribe, call 1-888-353-6397.

Needs of the Harbor:

A. Financial

- \$7,000 to renovate current girls' facilities. We desperately need to renovate the plumbing and electrical wiring in the girls' apartment. Both are very old, outdated, and barely functional. The conditions are to the point that use of the bathroom facilities has to be very limited.
- \$400/mo. to support an orphan in the program. This includes food, housing, education, medical care, clothes, transportation, and all staff

costs.

- \$500/mo. to cover the cost of rent for our follow-up apartment. Six to eight recent graduates live in a near by apartment for one more year. This allows them one more year to solidify all that they learned in the Harbor, and to do so in an encouraging environment with other recent graduates. Weekly as opposed to daily oversight is given to these adult orphans to assure that they are applying the lessons learned while at the Harbor.
- \$150,000 to purchase a 5-room apartment for the boys. This will house up to 10 full-time boys and one staff. Purchase of an apartment will free up \$750/mo. currently spent on rent to go back into the program. Purchase of property also gives the Harbor increasing stability and allows us to focus our time and energy on developing the participants versus finding and securing places to live. Unlike in America, the rental market in Russia is very unstable. It is not uncommon to have to move at least once a year when renting.

B. Staff

The Harbor is looking for a new volunteer that can teach English and computer skills to our participants. A minimum two year commitment is required.

Items for Prayer

- Pray for finances for the purchase of permanent facilities. It would minimize our single biggest expense, rent. It would also minimize the stress of frequent moves and the disruption to the program that this causes.
- Salvation for each of the participants and a growing walk with the Lord.
- Protection for all previous and current participants from the many temptations of their former lives and the godless society that surrounds them. Pray for friendships for all of them that will encourage godliness and healthy living.
- Jobs for the participants as they graduate from our program.

Strength, wisdom, patience, and endurance for our staff. Pray the Lord would encourage them with seeing the fruits of their labors, that He would keep their hearts aflame with His passion and vision for these kids. Pray that each of them would be growing in their own walks with the Lord and refreshed daily by His love and mercies

The Harbor is supported by tax deductible checks made to
CRM (Church Resource Ministries)
1240 N. Lakeview Ave. Suite 120
Anaheim CA 92807-1831

Designate on memo line for: The Harbor. Gifts may also be made via EFT (Electronic Fund Transfer) or via a credit/bank card. For additional information see www.crmnet.org or call 800.777.6658

Melinda Cathey, Executive Director
mcathey@crmnet.org 651.768.7388

Alex Krutov, Public Relations Director
8644 Jenner Lane South, Cottage Grove, MN 55016
651 .768 .7388 alexfaithful@netzero.com www.theharborspb.org