

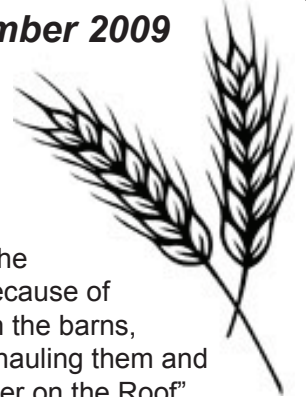


HARVEST TIME IN UKRAINE

September 2009

How did it feel to be back in Ukraine?

Wonderful, as warm memories from previous visits to our mission station in Rivne, Ukraine, tickled my mind. It was in 2002 that I was last at the mission, with our late Good Samaritan president, Pavel Radchuk and his family in the month of June.



September held a warm glow that was not only due to the burning of chaff in the fields. It was an underlying joy because of the completion of the year, of successful farming, hay in the barns, and families working together to bag the last potatoes, hauling them and the pumpkins into the barn by horse-drawn carts. "Fiddler on the Roof" is set in a village near Kiev with scenes like we saw. Each church chose a Sunday to celebrate Thanksgiving, as it is not a national holiday, and some were celebrating in September.

We used the season of harvest to harvest souls in the Ukraine. Our president Peter Radchuk, son Pete, Yuriy Radchuk's son Yuriy and my husband Chuck Strouss and myself, joined two men's singing groups to hold evangelistic meetings in villages and churches of W. and E. Ukraine. Avenyezer is the

group of men which work at our mission and represent Good Samaritan in outreaches during the year. At the time we arrived, they were building the raised roof with conference room beneath, on the 4th floor of our mission. The other singing group came with George Davidyuk, a popular Ukrainian Christian singer. Two of his group live in WA state and speak English.

We enjoyed traveling and singing with both groups. Ukrainian guys like to tease and have fun. It reminded me of my days teaching high school Ukrainian boys! Being the only woman made it interesting and we surely got fed well, by the churches who invited us. It was also the season for mushroom harvesting in the forests and people were selling their buckets of mushrooms by the road.



Fresh tomatoes and cucumbers were present for every meal and the bread in Ukraine is the very best-in the "bread basket" of the former Soviet Union. Our mission had a new cook who was unusually creative, making flower garnishes of radishes and beets and serving a different kind of soup each evening. Potatoes and chicken were the two most common foods served us. The most unusual meal was at the mission director's home in the forest. Rostik's wife served a whole goose stuffed with bulgar wheat. We found the food to be delicious.

Ukraine looks prosperous now, especially compared to when my brother and I first went there in 1996. There are gas stations with indoor bathrooms. The bazaar is about three times bigger in downtown Rivne, but I hear that there is much unemployment. There is some large farm machinery in the fields but the price of gasoline is high.

Traveling into the villages was challenging, as we were usually driving hurriedly in the late afternoon to get set up. First we ran into the communal flock of geese meandering across the road. Next we would navigate around the herd of cows coming home with a grandpa and small boys herding. Grandma could be seen managing a couple goats alongside the road. I often wondered if that would be my fate if I lived in Ukraine!!



Finally, we would get to the town square or open space to set up. At one village there were four wagons set side by side to form the platform. The band played and sat on chairs, otherwise the people stood for the service, with a few extra chairs for the infirm. Chuck and I used chairs. There was a baptismal after this service.

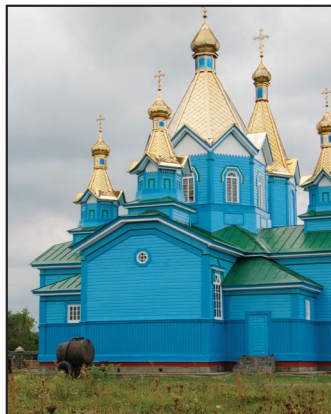


In each village and church there were those who came forward for salvation or healing prayer. Twice I noticed a woman in the audience having difficulty with the child they had brought. Both times I started praying that the child would quiet down, so the woman could listen, and God answered, because each of those women raised their hand at the end of the service. In the churches my husband gave a greeting. I was able to sing and play the piano many times. I sang "How Deep the Father's Love for Us and My Jesus, I Love Thee – which is in their hymnbooks. One of the churches where I sang had a home for widows on its property. They appreciated

our songs and prayers. Another church in Cherkassi, NE Ukraine, maintains a drug rehab center where we visited and prayed with the clients. These times were a blessing to me. We also consecrated a new pastor in the beautiful small church in Zozov, the village where the Radchuks were born and raised. The college aged children of the Avenyezer group– singing acappella were great! Pavel's vacant house is being remodeled for missionaries to live in.



Traveling eastward we spent a couple hours in Kiev. Kiev, over 1000 years old, is an experience for the eyes, with its majestic old buildings stretching away from the town center and golden domes of Orthodox cathedrals blinking in the sunshine. Statues of its heroes and fountains, which are lit up at night, fill the city.



We crossed the Dnieper River into E Ukraine and came to Priluki. It was especially dear to see the building in Priluki that Good Samaritan bought, through your help – an old air force quarters. The first floor has been remodeled by our mission workers from the states, with church offices and sanctuary. Pastor Vitaliy, wife Lesya and son have a nice apartment upstairs, where we stayed. The village churches of Berezova Rudka and Varva were a blessing to visit. I had lived in Priluki and Berezova Rudka in 2000, cooking for the team that was starting the churches. At Berezova-Rudka we held an outdoor service on the grape arbor covered driveway. Chuck said that it reminded him of the time his dad,

in Yakima, set up a tent in the grape arbor and had preachers hold revival meetings. He enjoyed eating the grapes, too! Pastor Sergei, the deacon mentioned in the summer newsletter, is doing a great job as pastor there, baptizing 29 people and the church is growing.

Slavik, the pastor of the Varva village church has a degenerative eye disease. Please pray for this young man who is doing an excellent job. At this church we all prayed over Pete and Yuriy because of their expressed desire to serve the Lord as missionaries like their dads and uncles do. Personally, they were a great help to us getting in and out of vans and interpreting the messages.

Another joy in E Ukraine was to meet two ladies from Anadyr, Chukotka. That is where I spent one month helping start a church choir in 1998. They reported that the Lord is really working among the youth. Praise God! Evangelizing that area was Pavel's vision and dream.

It was truly a blessing and privilege to be part of God's harvest in Ukraine in September of 2009. We believe that he used our prayers and encouragement to help others there.

- Mary Strouss