

Greetings from Ukraine, January 2009

Well another Winter break has come and gone, we are settled back in our little apartment and we are gearing up for another semester at UBI.

It was so wonderful to be "home", see so many of our loved ones and spend Christmas with our whole family (16 with 2 more on the way)! It was just TOTALLY AWESOME!!!



When we left Ukraine, over 2 months ago, we first flew to Dallas. We had planned to take our son and his wife out for dinner for her birthday. While we were waiting for our table, our son wanted to show us his new "toy", an I-Phone. He was showing us some pictures on it and one looked like a brownish volcano. I asked, "What is that?" Then as I looked at it closer I said, "Oh, how sweet, Rhett and Yulia sent you a photo of their "coming baby". Ashley and Alexis, both with HUGE grins, said, "It is NOT Rhett and Yulia's!!!!" Wow, what a greeting to come home to. Unreal, but grandchild #8 is now on the way~~~~~due July 13th. After 8 years of marriage Ashley and Alexis are going to be blessed with their first child. We were all just jumping up and down with joy!

We have also now found out that Rhett and Yulia's new one will be another precious boy. Such joy and happiness all these little ones bring. God is indeed good.

During our stay we were blessed to be in 6 states and 2 Canadian provinces. We try our hardest to share the Ukrainian work with as many as possible while we are at home as it falls nearly 100% on our shoulders to raise support for our students and funds for the many works of benevolence we are involved in. We weren't sure how this would go this time since the "economic crisis" had just hit but you were very generous and God blessed us abundantly. We didn't raise as much as in past years but know that many, many needs will be met by the funds that were given.

We left Jan. 30 from Dallas to head back to Ukraine. Sadly there was no "over nighting" on this flight so it was a very LONG, tiring trip. There was a lot of turbulence on the London/Kiev leg but overall it was an uneventful flight, which is just what you want when you fly!!!

When we arrived in Kiev it was minus 1 and blowing snow. There is only ONE "walk on" gateway at the Kiev airport (city of 3-4 million!!!!) and it was busy sooooooooooooo all the other planes have to park way out on the tarmac and you "get to" walk outside down the steps from the plane to a bus with the snow blowing in your face. The bus then drives you up to the airport door where you are all "allowed" to enter through only one door! We had an **EIGHT** hour layover here before our plane was to leave for Donetsk. Now in any other country this would be quite doable, however in any of the former Soviet countries this can be a nightmare. The domestic terminal in Kiev is like a big OLD warehouse with NO heat. It has only one small kiosk to get something to drink, hard chairs to sit in and no tables. We sat for hours with our coats and gloves on with our feet freezing and were soooooo ready to leave. (Socialism and Communism are sooooooooooooooooo great!!)

One really neat thing did happen during our wait. A young lady who spoke a bit of English came up to me and asked me if I would watch her luggage while she tried to find a calling card. When she came back (NO calling card in this "lovely" airport) we visited a bit. She said she was from Morocco. I asked her if she was Muslim. She said yes. (She

didn't have on long robes or any head covering). I asked her why she was in Ukraine and she told me she was going to study in Harkiev (a city about 2 hours from Donetsk) at a Pharmacy School. I told her that 3 families from the church of Christ had just moved to Harkiev and that if she needed any help to please contact them. Jay Don looked up their number on the computer and gave her their number and his card. You just never know when God maybe opening a door!

We finally arrived in Donetsk after being up for over 36 hours. There was lots of snow on the ground and it was very cold but our hearts were warmed when we saw 3 of our staff at the airport to greet us. They just overwhelmed us with love and wouldn't let us even touch our luggage. They loaded it all in a van and when we got to our apartment, they lugged every piece up the 84 steps. I was so happy about that because on the 3rd floor, I had to stop and rest a bit. (Guess we had gotten out of the habit of climbing that many stairs!!)



The next couple of days were a blur, from lack of sleep and the time change, but we did manage to get everything unpacked and put up. We also spent several hours at the school enjoying going through all the wonderful boxes that had been sent by the churches in Vancouver, Wa. and Calgary. Lots of blankets, sheets, children's and adult's clothes, toys and medical supplies were given. We have already sorted through many of them and some of them have already been given out. We could tell many hours and much love were put into the packing of these boxes. They will do more good than you can imagine. Thank you so very much!!!



On Tuesday we were both at the school when Natasha got word that one of our students had just died of a sudden heart attack. We were all in shock as this student, Sergei Kolchuck, was only 47 and had just been to the school on Monday to collect clothes to take to the orphanage in his community. Sergei was a true servant and Jesus was his absolute model. He was always about doing good for others and had been the preacher at one of the local churches for several years.

The funeral was Thursday and it was so hard. It's such a shock to everyone, especially the family, when one dies without any warning and so quickly. Funerals here are so "harsh" which makes it even harder.

The funeral was at the apartment building where Sergei lived, not inside but **OUTSIDE** right by the steps where you leave the building. All the family, relatives and friends were gathered around in a circle on the sidewalk right outside the doorway. The ground was covered in ice and snow and it had started to rain. The body was in an open wooden box which was placed on 2 kitchen stools. The back end of a van was opened over the coffin so the body wouldn't get wet. The poor wife stood or sat on the back

end of the car right by the open coffin the whole time. Many songs were sung, scriptures read and prayers offered as so many wanted to take part in the service. (Sergei was well loved and respected.) By now the rain had begun to pour and people had been standing on that ice and snow for nearly an hour. (Our feet were numb) These poor people endure such hardship in day to day living and dying. (I wish there was a way I could convey this picture but I just can't). As they sang and prayed all in Russian with just a bit of translation, I was thinking how very, very sad this all was. Then one of the preachers said, "Now, don't be sad today. If you had a chance to ask Sergei if he would want to come back he would surely say no as he's now with Jesus. He would just say, he'll wait for you to join him. Who would want to leave heaven to come back to earth?" This is so true and it will be so wonderful when we all get to heaven and won't have to endure hardship in any country. I did have one very pleasant thought~~~I hope Sergei tells Christina that Jay Don and I are still in Ukraine. I think she would like that!

From the depths of the valley to the top of the mountain is the way life seems to go. We were in the valley Thursday but on Saturday we were on the mountain top. Two of our staff were married after "making eyes" at each other for over 3 years! We had a sweet ceremony for them and then about 30 of us met at a local restaurant where the bride and groom provided us with a lovely meal and a fun day. I had been asked to decorate but the restaurant had such a beautiful room for this occasion I had to do very little~~~just a few personal touches is all it needed.

At the funeral, on Thursday, one of the little old ladies at Sergei's congregation grabbed me and just kept hugging me saying, "Please don't leave us, please don't leave us, please don't leave us." We felt compelled to go out to their congregation this past Sunday at Azotny. We wanted to do anything we could to encourage them. We knew they would be feeling a huge void. Jay Don first talked about Sergei and the servant he was. Then he gave a very encouraging lesson from I Thess. 4:13-18 where we are promised that those in Christ will be will be with Him forever along with those who have gone on before us. Because of our hope in this we don't have to be sad but we can be encouraged. There were about 30 there and they all seemed to appreciate it. One of our young students (age 20) who works there had no idea what to say to the group and was so thankful Jay Don was there to do this. These situations are difficult no matter what your age or how long you have been in ministry.

Today was opening chapel for our 2009 Spring Semester. It was so great to have all of our students back and feel their enthusiasm. The room was filled and Jay Don gave the opening lesson. He did a great job! (NO prejudice!!) He begin by saying we were all greatly missing a student who had all intentions of being here today with us but that the Lord had other plans for Sergei and he was with Him now. He told of Sergei's servant heart and challenged us all to be leaders in the church, not as the world views leaders but as God views them, which means being a servant at all times.



After Jay Don finished his part ,Slavic, the one who runs the Rehabilitation Center, wanted to share about his work. They like to call their center a "Spiritual Growth Center". They just have an amazing work going on there and of course Slavic brought **two** of our **four** new students who will join us this spring. He is just such a fine example of a young man on fire for evangelism. We are so proud of him!

Our visiting teacher this week is Eugene Strahov, one of our graduates who works in Crimea. He and his wife are the ones who have adopted FIVE teenage orphans and are very involved with orphan ministry. They are a great example of doing God's work not just "preaching" it. We are so blessed to be surrounded by such committed people.

Jay Don and I continually ask for you to remember us and our work in Ukraine in your prayers. There is so much to do and the church is just still on fire here in Ukraine and that is so exciting to us. Just this week the congregation that the Maluga's work for had 5 baptisms. They started with about 30-35 and are now close to 70. (Maluga's are a husband and wife team on our staff) This is happening in so many places here; seems as though tough economic times have a way of turning people to think of God and eternal things.

We thank you each again for your love, support and prayers and eagerly look forward to reporting more exciting things going on over here.

Please know we love you dearly and thank you so very much for your generosity.

Blessed Be the Name of the Lord,

Jay Don and Mary Lee