

## **Ploughshare April 2000 (Selected articles scanned in from the magazine)**

### **From The Rector**

I have been listening to a report about the Prime Minister's visit to Russia. People are claiming that he has not made a strong enough protest to the acting President about appalling violations of human rights in Chechnya - Amnesty International in particular. The complaint is that our government tends to be compliant when dealing with the strong and only tough when dealing with the weak. This may or may not be true of Mr Blair's stance, but it is a general human weakness.

Jesus Christ was the exact opposite. He was always gentle with the weak but remarkably tough when dealing with the strong. As a basically compliant person, I like to avoid conflict. However, I am learning that it often doesn't work. Like all of us, to some extent, I am called to be a peacemaker, not a peace lover.

A Vicar said recently "It's not my job to keep everybody happy. My job is to keep God happy. And, if people get upset, well I'm sorry about it, but there does come a point when you have to say, 'Well, that's the way it is!' I don't think I would put it quite like that, but he has a point.

The peace making of Jesus was incredibly costly. The unbelievable agony he experienced on Good Friday was all about reconciliation. He was bringing together the recalcitrant human race and Almighty God, destroying what the Apostle Paul calls the "dividing wall of hostility" between them.

As we reflect on this extraordinary peace making, and enjoy the vast benefits of it, we can and should be inspired to make for peace - in our community, our Churches, our families - however costly it may be.

**Christopher Frith**

### **All Change for our Mission Partners**

**Andrew and Mandy Lines** have returned to England after serving in Paraguay for about 9 years. They will be representing SAMS (the South American Mission Society) in the UK until the end of May. Then Andrew will start a new job as the General Secretary of Crosslinks, another Anglican Mission Agency. This will be a large responsibility and they will all value our continuing prayers.

**Paul and Ruth Lapworth** are also returning to England - in June. They will have completed their two year contract in Rwanda with CORD (Christian Outreach for Relief and Development).

Ruth is expecting their first child in September. Other good news has been funding for a new Landrover and a Cultural Centre in Mugesera.

They appreciate prayer for the right successors to be appointed and for guidance about their next stage.

## I Asked For...

I asked for **strength**...and God gave me difficulties to make me strong

I asked for **wisdom**...and God gave me problems to solve.

I asked for **prosperity**...and God gave me brawn and brain to work.

I asked for **courage**...and God gave me dangers to overcome.

I asked for **patience**...and God gave me situations where I was forced to wait.

I asked for **love**...and God gave me troubled people to help.

I asked for **favours**...and God gave me opportunities.

I received **nothing** I wanted...yet I received everything I needed

My prayer has been **answered**.

## Shoeboxes in Mostar

*Back in December 1999 Jane Simmonds was asked to represent Samaritan's Purse in Mostar. Bosnia on one of their shoebox gift distributions. She writes this account which will be of interest to those who have supported Samaritan's Purse in various ways over the years.*

Having experienced what I thought was the whole span of emotions from sheer shock when I was first asked to go, to the joy and anticipation of finally being able to experience the distribution of the shoebox gifts; right back again to the fear of what was ahead of me - the day eventually came! After a 2.30am start, and a long journey, I finally arrived in Sarajevo - but alas my luggage didn't! After 2 hours of hanging around to try and discover it's whereabouts, our team of 9 were finally able to set off on the last leg of the journey - a 2 hour journey to Mostar. (Swissair was confident that they would deliver my luggage the following day. Somehow I didn't share their confidence from the start.)

### **MOSTAR**

Following OCC's video 'Wake up to Bosnia' -93/94, I have always wondered what had happened since, in that particular city. It was obviously one of the worst affected cities at the height of the Balkan conflict, but, as is the norm, the media moves on to more current conflicts and we are no longer informed. Such has been my interest in the city, that I had also read a brilliant book called 'Miracle in Mostar' a few years ago. Never in a million years did I expect to visit this city on a shoebox distribution. From the moment I heard where I was going I just couldn't believe what a wonderful opportunity I was being given. I felt privileged from first having my invitation, but this destination somehow added to the excitement.

What a beautiful city, and what friendly people. We were welcomed, as you would expect Eastern Europeans to welcome us. The first morning we were out taking in the sights, and 9 of us were actually invited to coffee - literally off the street. That's how hospitable the people are. *But what devastation!* Our apartment block was riddled with bullet marks and shell holes. Every window had been blown out. Around our immediate vicinity didn't seem too bad. So we asked for an explanation. It was rather a strange feeling when we found out that the Moslems had set up their

HQ. in the basement of this block. Being therefore a prime target, it was also quite unnerving to imagine the number of people that had been killed just in our block alone.

The city was, and still is, split by the beautiful Naretva River. On the West of the river live the Croats, with the Muslims on the East. Seven bridges crossed this river in Mostar alone, and each one was destroyed. The most moving tale is of the beautiful 500 year old bridge which was destroyed for one reason only - to get at the hearts of the Muslims. (I was told this by a Croatian who had fought in the conflict.) The Muslims were so proud of this beautiful bridge and its heritage. They are now recovering the stone from the river, and with the help of the Spanish government, they hope to re-build the bridge, although it will take years; and never be the same.

Peacekeeping forces are to be seen, although thankfully not in large numbers, but every now and then you are reminded that relations between the two sides are somewhat 'tender'. The front line devastation has been left untouched. (Or at least that's certainly how it seems.)

Travelling down the frontline with just literally shells of buildings on both sides is actually a very 'unreal' experience. I can only describe it as if you were travelling down a film set: it just seems so unreal. This particular area is totally destroyed. People were still living here at the time! Some people were too scared to leave their homes - in fact couldn't leave their homes in the day! There was daylight curfew. Mostar is surrounded by hills. Troops were in the hills - drunk, by all accounts. And firing at anything that moved! Hence no one was allowed out, or simply didn't choose to go out in the daytime. However much we try to empathise with these people. We really have no idea what it must have been like to have lived through this conflict.

Our hosts were the local Christian church, which meets on *both* Croatian and Muslim sides of the river. In fact the larger Sunday service meets on the East (Moslem side); which is so encouraging. People are transferred from one side to the other in the church mini-bus, which soon became our trusted friend - complete with its flapping sky-roof, sweet smell of burning rubber, and a driver/guide who insisted on finding every puddle in Mostar, when it was time for us to get out! (And if he couldn't find puddles on the road - no problem, we just drove into the ones on the pavements!) Our guide Boris, was a wonderful 'young' Christian. Previous to his 9 months membership with the church, he had been a drug addict and dealer. God had released him from drink and drugs over night, and boy was he thankful. I sincerely hope that my dear friend will visit us sometime, so that you can all hear his testimony. Having fought as a volunteer, he is now ashamed of doing so, and even ashamed to call himself Croatian.

### **SHOEBOXES**

Of course, that's what I went for! Well to be quite honest, being able to visit this city, still badly scarred from the conflict, knowing that the children living here are themselves scarred, and in need of these gifts was enough of an experience for me. However we *were* able to distribute some shoeboxes, despite the fact that the president of Croatia died the morning we arrived. This news sent the West of Mostar (where we were staying) into three days of mourning.

This naturally limited our distribution activities, as it would have looked extremely disrespectful if the Christian church still wanted to give out gifts when the rest of Croatia was mourning. (Ah, so this has confused you! Yes, Mostar is in Bosnia, so why were we affected? The reason being that the west of the city is occupied by 90% Croats.)

However, thanks to the shoebox gifts, or packages as they are called out there, we were able to visit a Moslem school to hand out gifts. Without these packages the Christian church would not be welcome in this school. Apparently the simple shoebox has opened the door into so many schools in Mostar. Many schools and kindergartens had refused visits from the church in the past, but now welcome them because of these gifts. Not only are they welcome to distribute the gifts. They are able to take along a puppet show telling of the birth of Jesus: and indeed they are welcome back throughout the year at any time. This news is so encouraging because the local

church is obviously using these gifts as they were intended: to show God's love and to further His kingdom.

Although our timing didn't quite fit in with our partners distribution plans, this albeit rather short experience of distribution, was however the icing on the cake! I was particularly thankful for the opportunity, seeing as my cake was a 7 tier one! (For those who don't know me, I set the shoebox appeal up in the Chesterfield area seven years ago, and have since supported Samaritan's Purse all the year round. This, for various reasons has been my first opportunity to experience the distribution abroad.)

One sight that brought a smile to my face and still does as I recall it, is that of 150 or so children running *back* into school when in fact they should have been going home. We arrived slightly late for our distribution, and at 11.15am, these children had finished school! Due to a shortage of buildings and resources, this school worked on a three shift system, from 7.30am, up until 8pm. I have never seen children turn around so fast and literally run back down the school drive. The sight of our van full of gifts was all it took!

The distribution was quite strange actually. because initially you don't see the smiles of joy talked about. The children lined up in an orderly fashion, and because they had received gifts before, had a rough idea what to expect. The excitement comes a few minutes later when they're back in their classrooms opening the boxes.

*Then the atmosphere is just magical!* The `buzz' is hard to describe. You've got excited voices; mouth organs; whistles; girls trying on jewelry and hair decorations; boys playing cars; four or five looking into one box; others quietly studying the photos and the cards; others mouths full of sweets and chocolate - all desperate to have their photographs taken! I found one disappointed face, so was able to exchange his box and bring about the biggest smile of the day. I'm so thankful that I saw him, and could help. Another little boy would not open his box, not even to peep inside. When I asked why, I was told: " His mamma is waiting at home". How lovely!

I met a missionary working for a charity 'Mission without Borders' who distributes the packages in a village near Split. I asked if these gifts really were needed. She nearly cried as she told me that the families could not afford to feed their children, there really was not enough food to go around, so gifts were certainly out of the question. No other charity helps these families, and she assured me that these packages are the *only* gifts these children ever receive. Hearing this confirms the fact that our shoebox gifts, our messages of love and hope, are really getting to the children who need them.

We also visited a container village on the outskirts of the city. Many of you will have heard of this village through Barbara Goodacre. Novimost International, who have worked for a number of years in Mostar, support the refugees here, and their missionaries worship at our host church. The container village houses many refugee families from Mostar. Having lived in these shipping containers for 5 years they have no immediate means of returning to their homes. We were then deeply privileged to meet some Kosovan refugees also living at this site. This was an extremely humbling experience. (as was the whole trip). Even in a large barrack style building, housing 55 people. shoes were taken off, before entering the living quarters. The one family I met had no desire or heart to return to Kosovo. Their only dream was to go to Germany where they had family. However, visas are essential. With no papers, having had to leave their home rather hurriedly, visas are out of the question. Unfortunately the daughter of the family whisked me away, so I didn't find out any more. The only blessing I can find in this situation is that the whole family was together - five children, mother and thankfully the father too.

These are but a *few* of my experiences and reflections. I shall have a lasting memory of Mostar and it's beauty, shadowed by the man-made devastation. My

memories too will be of the 'living' church we worshipped in; the Kosovan refugees we met, and of the seemingly 'happy' children we shared such joy with. Our spectacular journey back to Sarajevo was a 2 hour reminder of the past conflict. Whatever bridge we saw on that long journey was either blown up, or stood out starkly as being 'new' and just looked totally out of place. I shall be eternally grateful for this experience, which will undoubtedly add another dimension to the work I carry out for Operation Christmas Child and other of Samaritan's Purse's projects. I was also

grateful for my luggage, which was waiting to be picked up at Sarajevo before the return journey! (I never thought I was cut out for travelling light, but it proves that God provides if you trust him.)

On my return, I have found life a little difficult. When initially asked had the experience changed me, I replied (just 1 day later), no. I explained that I had helped out for long enough, I knew what situations these people were living in etc. etc., that I'd had a rough idea what to expect. Then I slowly came down to earth. Having returned on 14th Dec., I had to get on with the normal 'spending' for my son's 10th birthday, and the normal 'spending' for a Western Christmas! Then I suddenly realised that yes, this trip had affected me quite considerably - probably more than I could try to explain.

The people I met had experienced such terrible hardships, children had seen atrocities which we hope we never have to experience, let alone our children and grandchildren. Many refugees from Mostar were living in temporary accommodation a few miles away, which they had been in for 5 years already, knowing that there was no way out. I met three Christian teenagers from a refugee camp which we had not visited, and they were so happy - genuinely full of life. They had no where to go, yet they knew God loved them and had a plan for them. Meeting these three and others like them humbled me; knowing that they have lost so much, yet what they do have is precious to them, and they thank God for it all. The hardest thing was having to leave these people, knowing that other than show a little bit of love and concern and compassion; there was nothing I could do to get them out of their situation.

In these last few weeks I have looked around our home and cried, knowing that we don't need half of what we have. I do thank God for what he has blessed us with, often, and in gratitude, try to help others by means of appreciation to Him, and to show his love. After all, we only have what we've got by the grace of God. Throughout the Christmas period though, and probably for the rest of my life, I was and shall be 'haunted' for want of a better word, by images of the beautiful children we met. As you would expect, not all of them were happy, and those images hurt more, because even our brief encounter didn't seem to make a difference. I pray that one day, one girl at the container village in particular will be able to look back and see some good come of our visit.

I sincerely hope that after reading this you will all appreciate what power there is in a simple little shoebox gift. Not only do they bring joy to the children and their parents, but the children hear the gospel message as a result of the distribution, and who knows what that may lead to. Thank you all so much for the support you have shown Samaritan's Purse in the past, and we naturally hope we can rely on your continued support in the future.

## Hope for Eastern Europe

### Planning for the May 2000 Mission to Romania

The team is looking forward to fresh challenges but in the reassurance of God's love and support for so many answers to prayer in recent months. The Lord is truly wonderful and fulfils all of our needs when we ask in faith.

This May we have the privilege of visiting Bucharest to complete the final phase of the building work at Emmanuel Mission thanks to a very generous donation of new doors and windows - given in love and in answer to prayer. You may remember that God gave the Romanian Christians a clear vision to build a community outreach centre in Bucharest for very poor and deprived people, especially homeless children. The May mission will then move on with supplies to Constanta General hospital plus supplies for the outreach work around Basarabi. This area is very remote and poor.

The next phase of the journey will take us to the Leper community at Tichilesti and the special school in Isaccea. The school relies on our continued support and now cares for 170 children. The food and other emergency provisions supplied by us have been a lifeline throughout the winter months.

At the same time, another lorry will be travelling out to the gypsy community at Tinca West Oradeu where we plan to support a building programme to re-house ten families. We still need your help and encouragement to complete the building programme, support, clothe and support-feed them, and share the good news of Jesus.

The final part of our journey will be to a new region where we will link up with Daniel Tintean, a Minister of a very large church in Hunedoava. He has sent an urgent request for help as the poverty stricken area has **experienced factory closures and few job prospects. We feel strongly led to trust God and step out in faith once more.**

Please support us. Further information about how you can help is available from us.

**Pamela Gratton**

## The Leprosy Mission

The Leprosy Mission was founded 125 years ago by a true visionary: Wellesley Bailey's dream and calling was to relieve in Christ's name the appalling suffering of people affected by leprosy.

Dr Sunil Anand is also a man of vision. Driven by the need to dispel the stigma leprosy, he also wants to see his hospital pay for itself. And he has faith that both aims can be achieved by a single policy: integrated healthcare.

Sunil is Superintendent of TLM's Kothara hospital in the Indian state of Maharashtra. He is ably supported by his wife, Shyamala, an experienced ophthalmologist. One of the biggest and busiest of TLM's centres in India, the 90 bed hospital serves a predominately rural population of eight million people in a mountainous area bordering Madhya Pradesh. The nearest government hospitals are miles away, and the cost of private medical care is more than most people can bear in such a poor part of India.

For these reasons, the hospital has experienced a rapid growth in demand for its excellent general healthcare facilities as well as for leprosy treatment, with outpatient attendance nearly trebling in the last five years.

Integrating leprosy care with general medical treatment is helping to remove much of the stigma associated with the disease.

Although TLM's care of leprosy sufferers is always provided free of payment, a modest charge is levied for the treatment of general ailments according to patients' means. This has already enabled the hospital to cover 50% of its running costs.

With the increase in general referrals, it plans to be financially self sufficient in five years time.

In order to accommodate the expansion, a new outpatient block is to be built and equipped at a cost of £200,000. It will include a minor operating theatre, physiotherapy and X-ray departments, a laboratory and improved facilities for the specialist services which the hospital has developed in ophthalmology and dermatology.

A further £150,000 will be needed for running costs over the next five years, calculated on a sliding scale until the hospital achieves self-sufficiency. Thanks to a handful of very generous donors. Contributions amounting to over £160,000 have already been received towards the £350,000 target. and I now ask for your support to help raise the rest.

The hospital may be offering more general health care, but the treatment of leprosy always comes first. Patients like 14 year old Manita will continue to owe their recovery to the Christian compassion and medical skills of our staff at Kothara. It was not long ago that her father brought her to the hospital. Due to a combination of ignorance and fear, her leprosy had been left untreated for years and the disease had already taken a devastating toll: her hands were clawed, her feet ulcerated and partial paralysis of the eyelids was preventing her from blinking. She was at risk of becoming blind.

It is going to be a long haul for Manita. As well as a course of multidrug therapy to rid her body of the leprosy germs, she will need several operations to correct her deformities and save her sight. But she is undaunted and completely different from the timid little girl who was first admitted to TLM's Kothara hospital. She mingles freely and happily among the other young patients, both those with leprosy and those with general complaints like asthma or diabetes.

She *knows* she can be cured, she *knows* she can look forward to leading a normal life without the pain and stigma of leprosy.

By pioneering a policy of integrated healthcare, TLM's Kothara hospital is seeking not only to dispel this stigma, but also to whittle down its dependence on outside support. But first Sunil and his staff will need your help to turn these visions into reality.

The Leprosy Mission is a Christian medical charity bringing healing and compassion to the victims of leprosy worldwide.

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