

## October 2011 Impressions of Riga, Gaddafi's Fall, China

This Sunday's *Bible Companion* readings include John 19, and there's an MP3 about this chapter at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/jn19.mp3>

We're pleased to say that our brother Charles, for whom we invited your prayers, has been given leave to stay in Latvia and not to be returned to his country of origin. He's giving a special testimony about it this Sunday at the Riga Bible Centre.

We're also pleased to tell you of the baptism of SANDIS; you can see him here along with his girlfriend Julija and with Linda Jamieson (Campsie NSW) and Robin Jones (Hurstville NSW) in Riga's picturesque city centre:



We really could do with more boots on the ground in Latvia. Sister Robin shares her impressions as follows:

This is my fourth trip to Riga, as far away from Australia as you can go. Before it was part of the EU the Population was 2.7 million, now it's 2 million. Joining the EU opened the way for people to leave, and leave they have, the young, those wanting a "better life", those wanting to get out of the awfully depressive and difficult situation here. Maybe half the population speak Latvian, the rest Russian, most young people understand English and most people can speak Russian even if they are Latvian. Latvia has been independent of Russia for 20 years.

"The poor you always have with you" and "To the poor the gospel is preached". Most cities have their poor and homeless, there just seem more of them here in Riga and a wider gap between the haves and have nots. It's never seemed to me like a place you would choose to come just for a holiday. After dark (which starts early in their long winters) the drunks come out, and the poor who rummage through the bins for food. People keep dogs to protect their property, and there's the great poverty which is confronting, especially because this is supposed to be "Europe". Many of the poor and most of our brothers and sisters have missing or decaying teeth, and there are more bent over old people here from lack of vitamin D than you see in Australia. Mixed with the very poor are the young and working class who seem to dress in stark contrast. There are less Mums in high heels pushing prams than there used to be, but still people don't smile at you as you pass them in the street. I snapped a typical photo of people who just look grumpy waiting for a tram. If you go to the new shopping centres you are treated with suspicion with security guards at the doors. There seem to be so many people with suspicious "no faces". Those who have read "The Grace Awakening" will understand that these are the people you wouldn't ask to help you – their face looks like they will say "no".



But the Bible Centre here is flourishing. Mostly it's the people living in the many night shelters and the refugees who cling to the hope of something better and stay for the two and a half hour meeting on Sunday with lunch and discussion, and long Bible class on Mondays. The attendance at Bible class is often around 80. Then there's the growing mum's group run by Cindy. This is made up of more "normal" young mum's, who are just a bit lonely or house bound, whom Cindy met in the park whilst walking Evija. This week one of them organised dancing for

the mum's and toddlers. Several of them are looking for more from life and requested extra get togethers to toss around ideas. Cindy is now planning more gospel outreach for women and hopes that some of them will come. But everything is a struggle with a new baby and very active toddler, even getting out of the block of flats, allowing time to dress toddler and baby in "outdoor clothes" against the Winter, then with a double pusher which requires getting down stairs before you can attempt to get it into a tiny lift which closes on you as you try (which hurts!). But in the midst of the harshness small miracles seem to happen almost daily and clearly God is at work. Here are the women doing some dancing with their babies:



Sister Iveta livened up Bible Class on Monday by singing a song in Latvian unaccompanied, you can hear the recording at <http://www.carelinks.net/audio/ivetasong.mp3> She has a degree in music and drama from the University of Riga, but works as a road and yard sweeper, rather typical of so much human wastage which there is in the former USSR. Here she is singing to us:



The Russian population is especially biased against. A young married couple, brother Slavik and sister Tanya, are living in a makeshift hut on derelict land, all because they haven't got the right documents. There's no electricity, water, toilet or any utilities at all. They are cooking on an open fire, and the temperatures are freezing at night. They have been given "Peggy blankets", named after sister Peggy Joseph of Bodalla NSW, and others made by a sister Debbie Clements from UK. The situation is even worse because Tanya is now pregnant. Despite having nothing to eat much, and getting water from a well in a cemetery about 500 meters away, they have an MP3 player, they recharge the batteries at the Bible Centre. All the meetings are recorded, and they listen to them as they sit there in the cold, each with one ear plug, as you can see in the photo:



One way they get money is to collect bottles and take them to the shops which give literally 2 or 3 cents for each bottle. But you need a lot of bottles to buy a loaf of bread:



Many people are forced to pawn their possessions at the pawnbrokers at the end of the week, just to buy food. Pawnbrokers are on every street corner it seems:



Or you can simply take your clothes to the secondhand clothes shops which are also everywhere:



It really is a hard life, but the good news of Jesus is really good news for the people here and is very attractive to so many of them.

### **THE FALL OF GADDAFI**

Carelinks made a visit to Libya a few years ago and baptized some people there, amidst considerable nastiness from the Gaddafi regime; one of those brethren escaped to Italy and is now in Switzerland. We have however lost contact with the other brethren there and are hoping the new regime will allow easier communication with them. Please pray for them.

We believe that Gaddafi's fall and the volatile situation in North Africa and Syria at this time are direct preparations for the fulfilment of Bible prophecy. Our views have been updated since Gaddafi's fall and can be seen at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/ld/d1-2.htm> - you are welcome to share with others.

### **CHINA**

We're pleased to report the baptism of brother YIN; he has a small house group he is involved with who are non-trinitarian and we look forward to fruitful contact with them.

**With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks**