

Sister in Latvia, May 2006

Firstly, many thanks for your responses to the various appeals made recently. Without them, we couldn't go on. Especially, and we mean this, we appreciate your prayers. We've had several suggestions re. how to teach Bible Basics to the illiterate using pictures, you can view them at <http://www.carelinks.net/books/bbillit.htm> - we welcome any more visuals. We're also experimenting with the idea of opening an online radio station- this seems a powerful and virtually free way of broadcasting the Gospel. We envisage a mixture of topical Bible talks, interviews and music. At this stage, we'd like to invite anyone who has any ideas about online broadcasting, any talks or music in MP3 format, to get in touch [please don't send the MP3 files to us right now, we'll advise you what to do with them by email]. We've started distributing Wrested Scriptures as mentioned in a previous carelink.



Here's Sister Irma using the book along with her Bible in writing to a contact:

We continue to face problems in knowing how to help our needy sisters in the Baltics. Sister Liliya searches the garbage cans for things, and recently found a brand new bottle of shampoo, she was so delighted, but she has to go round to another brother and sister's apartment in order to have water to use it. She has to leave the woman's shelter soon as she can only stay there for a certain number of nights each year, and it's really a problem knowing where to house her. Then there is the problem of our beloved Sister Aleksandra, a stalwart in the faith for 14 years now. She is housebound, and it costs about US\$50 to get a doctor to make a home visit, let alone the high cost of medicines for her heart, kidney and many other complaints. There is no lift in her block and she can't get down the 6 flights of steps- she'd have to be taken down on a stretcher. All her shopping has to be done for her. Her pension is barely enough to pay the utilities, let alone anything else. We made a recording of her story, and here is a summary transcript:

Can you tell us how you came to the Truth?

It's such a long story, I think there was not a moment in my long life when God was not present, to bring me to Him. Maybe it started before the war, in our village, my mother was a believer, but all I can remember was that she would sit in a corner and read from her Bible, and take bread and juice with a covering on her head every Sunday. This was Stalin's time, it was illegal to have a Bible or go to church. It left an impression upon me from a child.

Did she tell you anything about the Bible? Did you read with her?

No, not that I can recall. But then there was the war. My father went away to the front, and we never saw him again. The Germans came, and we ran into the forest. We watched them burn the village. Our houses were made of wood and they burnt easily. They started at one end of the village, it was just houses down a street. They stood at one end of it and started, we were standing there in the trees watching. They say, when you are old you can remember the past better than you can recent things, I suppose with me it is true, as I remember all that as if it was yesterday. I see it all still. I don't know why, but I ran back across the fields to our house, and went inside and took the Bible, it was 2 volumes, Old Testament and New Testament. I have it

here with me still. Published in 1917 in what was Petrograd, what became Leningrad. The men were shouting at me to come back, but I ran quickly. I took the Bible and ran back to the woods.

And then what happened?

Well how we survived the next 2 years I don't know. We went deeper into the forest, we were village people, we loved our village, and it was burnt to nothing, and Germans were passing that road all the time, moving towards Leningrad. We made shelters in the forest, in the ground. It was the Winter of... 1941, or 1942, I am not good with dates. The temperature was so low that year. It killed many Germans, but it killed many of us too. We had few clothes, we lived on berries, we were always feeling sick and weak. My little sister died there in the forest, and then my mother. We buried them as best we could. We Russians are religious people, we have God in our soul, despite the Stalin times, the atheism etc. In the forest we were often talking about God. We prayed to God, we tried praying together, and I often prayed on my own. The older people remembered how the churches were before 1917. They said we must light candles for God to hear us. We had no candles, but we lit bits of pine twigs and cones, they burn well. I remember thinking, why will God hear us, because we lit candles? I wondered whether if we had real candles, God would hear us, but I decided He wouldn't. When I lost my mother and my little sister, and saw our neighbours some of them literally freeze to death, I had strange feelings about God. I knew more than ever that God is there, but I so wished I could understand Him and that He would save us. I tried to read the Bible I took, but I couldn't understand it. I buried it, wrapped it in cloth, at a certain place in the pine forest.

So how did you survive?

Only by God's grace. I was one of the few from the village who survived that time. You can see, how I have chronic arthritis, rheumatism, heart problems, it must go back to those long months sleeping in our shelters in the forest, living on whatever we could, even we boiled tree bark. We used to walk many kilometres to find villages which might give us food. But Stalin had ordered to burn everything to give Germans nothing, actually nobody had food. A whole group of us were captured. I was a teenage girl. They took us to a railway station near a town, I am not even sure what town. I heard a language other than Russian for the first time in my life. We were in a big group with other prisoners on a railway platform for ages. The men said, 'They will kill us, and they will rape you'. We were such country people, I had never heard the word rape, I could only guess what it was. I prayed and prayed to God. I said I would do everything for God and love Him always if He would save me. Then, the guards changed shift. The older women said, to run, that it was better for us girls to run than to remain as prisoners. So, we just ran across the tracks. Believe it or not, I could run fast then. Now, I can barely move around my apartment. But then, I could run. We ran through the gap left by the guards who were changing shift, and the other guards shouted at us, but I just kept running, I was thinking only, 'God, please, please, help me'. We got to some woods and then we looked back. I suppose they thought we weren't worth bothering with. Then we heard shooting. Probably the men and older women were all shot on that railway siding. I never saw them again. We got to a village, and they told us that Germans were leaving, that we were winning. It didn't seem like it, everyone was hungry, everything was burnt and ruined. Eventually I got to Leningrad.

So how did all that influence you spiritually?

I was so grateful to God for saving my life. I so wanted to love Him, to give myself to Him, but I can't really explain, this huge feeling like a cloud over me, that I didn't understand Him. I asked

Him to tell me about Him, but there seemed no answer. I remembered my mother reading her Bible alone in the corner before the war. I wanted to be like her. I want to say to you, as testimony, I so love my mother. I do not know what she believed or how she believed, but I hope she will be in the Kingdom of God. Anyway, as I said, there was this terrible feeling at the back of my mind, that I so wanted to know God, but, I couldn't seem to find Him. I went back to the forest and dug up the Bibles, those two volumes. They were a bit spoilt but you can still read it OK. I have kept them with me all my life.

Were you angry with God for all you lost?

No. I was never, ever angry with God. I know people get angry with God about death, loss, but even in the forest, when I heard people both praying to God and cursing God, I never had that feeling. All I remember was thinking that we were supposed to be atheists, but there in the forest, people were thinking of God, to pray to Him or even curse Him. I only ever prayed to Him and wanted to know Him and was confused by Him.

Did you get involved with any church?

Not really. I remember that thing about trying to burn candles in the forest, so that God would help us. It always seemed to me that our Russian Orthodox church wasn't right. Something was missing there, if God only hears you if you burn candles. Of course, I wondered whether the Orthodox church could show me the truth about God. When I got to Leningrad, I met the man who was to become my husband. We decided to get married. He was a good man but a product of Soviet thinking and Marxist-Leninism. I said I wanted to have a marriage blessed by God. I asked him how we should do this, he said he didn't know, but he understood we had to have a priest to bless us and not just some paper from the registration office. I found a priest, or someone who said he was one. He said he would give us a secret ceremony. But he wanted some bottles of vodka to do it. I brought him the vodka the day before we were to meet. We went to him the next day, and he was drunk, but he did some sort of ceremony for us, said some words from a prayer book and burnt some incense. I knew in my heart this wasn't the true church. By then, the USSR had taken over Latvia, and we were sent to live in Riga. I took the Bibles with me. We were given jobs and an apartment, it was wonderful for us after what we had gone through. And so began the decades of life in Soviet Latvia. I worked, we had our children, we lived normal life. It's all like 5 minutes for me, from a spiritual point of view. I used to try to read the Bible, I prayed to understand it. I met with people involved with the underground churches, but to be honest I was scared to be involved with them, I didn't want to be taken away from my children and sent to a camp. I never told people I had a Bible, it was my secret. My desire to know God never left me, but it seemed as if the door was shut.

So how did you come to be a Christadelphian?

In 1991, Soviet occupation ended and Latvia was free, all controls on religion and possession of Bibles were lifted. I then saw an advertisement in the newspaper, offering a book called Bible Basics that would explain the Bible without the need for churches and traditions. I knew this was the answer. I wrote to England, it was my first letter to a Western country in my life. I wrote in Russian and I hoped they would understand. I received my copy, and I read it over many times, and started reading my precious Bible using the Bible Companion. Everything started to get clear. I received a correspondence course, and I sent the answers to Duncan in Vilnius. Then I had a letter from Duncan, that he was coming to Riga and would like to meet me. I met him, and brother Vladimir Tuyev. We spoke for a long time, discussing all things, and Duncan said I

was nearly ready for baptism, and I should study more, and he would come again to see me. I then started feeling that I was not worthy to be baptized, that I am too old. I had a dream, where Duncan was baptizing me. It gave me strength, to know that actually I was worthy enough to be baptized. Duncan came again, and we had a long discussion about all the doctrines, and he passed me for baptism. I put on my best dress and met Duncan and some other brethren at a sauna. I had difficulty moving my legs even then, because of my arthritis. We had worked out that I could not be completely covered in water in our bath tub, and I so wanted it all to be done properly. The brothers lowered me into the sauna, and lifted me up out again. So, I was baptized!

So can you tell us about your life as a Christadelphian in the Riga ecclesia?

When Duncan and Cindy moved to Riga, they used to pick me up every Sunday for the meetings. I always enjoyed meeting with the ecclesia and the discussions about the daily readings. I was given tracts advertising Bible Basics, and I used to walk down the stairs to the entrance to our block. We have no lift, it took me about 10 minutes to get down the stairs and about 20 minutes to climb back up again. I put the tracts in the letter box rack at the entrance to our block. They were my missionary journeys. And I write to many people telling them about the Truth and sending them literature. But now I am too sick with my heart and other problems to even go out of the apartment [I live with my daughter and son-in-law]. Cindy comes round to see me every week to take my blood pressure and bring me medicines and break bread with me. I love her so much. I know I am with the true family of God. I phone every Sunday to see how the meeting went, as now I can't get out. My pension is so small I can't afford the medicines prescribed, it is enough only for my share of the food and utilities on the apartment. When I can, I ask my daughter to buy biscuits so Cindy can take them to the meeting and the others can have them when they have tea during the break, so they remember me. What I like most about Christadelphians is the way of reading from the Bible Companion. It means I can keep in touch in spirit with all the others who are reading the same chapters each day. I read the portions three times each day. I write down the verses I like the most in a diary. I am worried that I am so forgetful, and that my sight is going, I need my cataracts fixed, but they say I am too weak to have it done. I just worry that what I read in the morning, I've forgotten by lunchtime, and so I re-read the portions, I hope God forgives me. I pray a lot, I look out of my window and pray, that Jesus will come soon. I am dying, I know I am, if Jesus doesn't come soon then I will die. But I am very tired of life, I can hardly move from my room to the kitchen or the toilet, what I know and believe is that I will rise again. I only would like that written on my gravestone, if you don't mind to arrange it. I have found what I was looking for all my life, I wish I had found it earlier, but it was as God arranged it. I believe in the gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Elpis Israel, as it says in that book. I read that book a few times, you see I have not so much to do apart from to pray or read, and I believe all that, that Jesus is going to come, and I will be young again, and I will be able to give myself to God wholly and not with all the limitations I've always had. All I can say to God and to you is thank you, thank you, thank you...

[This interview was recorded in Russian, in between many tears, and this transcript has been edited for clarity, as there were several repetitions].



Sis. Aleksandra weeping as she tells her story

Below are some photos taken just this week of our sister with her Bible. She lives in a tiny room, with just a bed, table, and her clothes and books under the bed. This is where she is 'housebound'- she makes trips to the toilet and kitchen with difficulty.



Note the date- Petrograd, 1917

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, no more Bibles were printed in Russia for many years. Petrograd became Leningrad, and is now St. Petersburg. This is the very Bible which belonged to our sister's mother, which she read in the corner of their home in the 1930s, and which Sis Aleksandra grabbed from the Nazi soldiers at the last moment and buried in the pine forest.



So please do pray for our sisters, and support them as you can. Information re donations is at <http://www.carelinks.net/about/donate.htm>

We'd also like to share with you an email from a very grateful sister [translated]:

Hi Cindy!

Thanks for the letter!

Prayers really give strength and spiritual encouragement. Thanks for your prayers. My break (from work) has started and that is very good, because now I have time, and can study. I received some bad news, that my work, where I distribute the newspapers (in the morning) will in the future pay less. A few of my work colleagues have quit. I also am afraid. I am used to working for a tiny salary. I have panic attacks to be left totally without financial means. And therefore I put up with it all: a small salary, dangerous work and other problems. But at the moment I also feel like throwing away that bad paying job and look for another one, but there are already big problems with unemployment in the whole country and that prevents me from giving it up. If I didn't receive help from the brothers and sisters in the United Kingdom I would totally be in debt. Thanks be to God, for sympathetic people. This month is more difficult for me,

because I haven't received any help and I have to make do with what there is, but there is nothing left. Thanks be to God, that I have my mother, and that she helps as much as she can with the kids, but unfortunately almost all the money goes on her medicines. We are not totally starving, because we bought some potatoes, and my mother bought milk. But the payments... they haunt me. We still don't have any debts, but if I don't pay them this month, there will be. At the moment I am sitting in college and writing this letter, thanks be to God for this opportunity, because I can't find money for the internet cafe, and, between us, I even walk to college, and this morning I got totally soaked because there was a lot of rain. Ok then, May God bless you, and bye!!!

Finally, a poem written and sent in for distribution by Sis. Tiffany Cwiek of Australia

Just A Minute

I have only just a minute,

Only 60 seconds in it -

Didn't want it, didn't choose it;

Can't ignore it, can't refuse it,

And I know I daren't abuse it,

So it's up to me to use it! It is only just a minute,

But there ARE 60 seconds in it!

Wisely used, we'll see a difference -

We will find less interference

from all the outside influence

that strives so hard for affluence. If we use up every minute -

stretch to the fullest the seconds in it -

we can look with satisfaction

back on a life so filled with action;

We'll almost hear the words "Well Done!"

as we strive our very best to run. How would we feel, in hour of need,

If God looked stern and we did plead

"I had only just a minute!?" ...

... "But you had 60 seconds in it!"

With love from your brothers and sisters of CCM