

RUSSIA – JUNE 2009



Orphanages

The above pictures were taken at Peterhoff #2 orphanage. It was a beautiful day and we were able to go outside with the children. Everyone had a great time. The head teacher at the orphanage was excited to tell me about the changes that have been made since the last time I was there. They have divided the children up into three grades and in the fall three teachers will come in to teach the children. This is amazing! Only a few short years ago they didn't believe these children could do anything much less learn. This is something we have been working towards and praying for since we started going to Russia. They have even started a computer lab for the children. WOW!!

We were also able to visit the Pavlovsk orphanage. We had a good meeting with the deputy director and were able to see some of the older children. They have started a residential program for the children who are turning 18 so they can stay at Pavlovsk and work instead of being transferred to the adult facilities. This new program has a capacity for 50 residents. They also now have several volunteer groups coming in to work with the children. Most of these volunteers are Russians, which is GREAT and something else we have hoped and prayed for.



Alisa (in Blue) and Natasha (in Red) are escorted by a handsome boy from Peterhoff. I think he must be thinking “this is my lucky day!”

A special “Thank You” to Alisa for all of her hard work on this trip. You are amazing!

Family Centers



Above are a few of the members of the family center for young adults in Siskoresk. Top Row: Anton, Alisa, Tanya and then her mother, Tamara who is the director of the center. Front Row: Marina, director of the “My Family” center and newly appointed director of “My Family” for the whole Leningrad region”, Andrea, and Katya.

We also had some good news from Marina on several of the other families. Two of the families who have older non-ambulatory children had government issued flats on upper floors of their buildings. Because the children were older (teenagers) there was no way to carry them down the stairs so they were literally trapped in their apartments. After several years of fighting with mountains of red tape, both families have been given first floor apartments so now Andrea and Sveta can go outside!!

ADULT GIRLS

As you all know I have been following a group of adult girls who I first met almost 10 years ago at the Pavlovsk orphanage. They have become very special to me and I want to update you on two of them in particular.



Sveta had her baby at the beginning of June. Victoria is now a little over a month old and is a beautiful, healthy baby girl. Sveta is a good mom and is doing her very best for her daughter. Unfortunately, Sveta’s husband has already disappeared from the picture and has left his wife and daughter to fend for themselves.

Lena is the other girl I want to give you an update on. We got word a few months ago that Lena's mother had put her into a mental institution. This was very odd news as Lena was the one who was working and supporting the family (herself, her mother, and her sister) financially. Just some brief background - Lena's mother sent her to the Pavlovsk orphanage when Lena was about 8 years old and when she turned 18 she went back to live with her mother. Lena's mother also grew up in an orphanage and has a long history of alcohol abuse.

One of my goals for this trip was to find Lena and see if she was okay. After pursuing the leads we had from Sveta through others and talking with Lena's mom we were able to pinpoint the facility in which we thought she was being held. This facility is located a few hours south of St. Petersburg. We called and were immediately told that there was no one there by that name. We continued to pursue the issue and after they grilled us about who we were and why we wanted to see her, we were then told that a girl had "just been brought in" and they would check to see if it was her and call us back. Amazingly, they did call back and said that Lena was there and wanted to see us. SO...miraculously we were granted permission to visit.

We drove to the facility and found the building that they had indicated. Once we reached the correct wing of the building we were taken through a locked door into a small entry way and the door was immediately locked behind us. The nurse then unlocked the opposite door and Lena was escorted in and the second door was immediately relocked. With the nurse present to monitor our conversation and search the gifts we had brought to Lena we were able to sit on a small bench and talk to her.

As soon as Lena saw us she started crying. She has been locked up in this mental institution for 7 months! No one has come to visit her. There are a lot of details I cannot go into here but the bottom line is that her mother had her locked up there because she wanted Lena's name officially off of the flat in which they are all registered. And because Lena's paperwork is still stamped disabled and all of her work history is "unofficial" her mother was able have her held in this mental institution. It is like something out of a horror movie!

Lena has a court date coming up in August. If she can prove that she is a productive worker according to the state she might be released! We want to do everything we can for her. PLEASE PRAY FOR LENA AND THIS COURT DATE!! My heart breaks every time I think of her...which is constantly.

This is only a brief summary of the trip. It was great to reconnect with everyone in Russia. There are many more things we were able to do and accomplish. If you would like to hear more about the trip or have any questions just give me a call.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU WHO PRAYED FOR THE TRIP AND TO ALL WHO MADE THIS TRIP POSSIBLE!

Much Love, Beth