

Making Dreams Come True (Then and Now)

A trip to Kyiv this summer fulfilled a dream that began in 1984. It birthed a new dream to help others trapped in despair.

By Michael Curran

This past July I made a trip to Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine together with Jeff Thompson, director of Mercy Projects in Murrieta, California. The memory of my first trip 33 years ago in 1984 flooded my mind. This short story is about the connection of those two amazing journeys. (www.mercyprojects.org)

1984 (The year not the book)

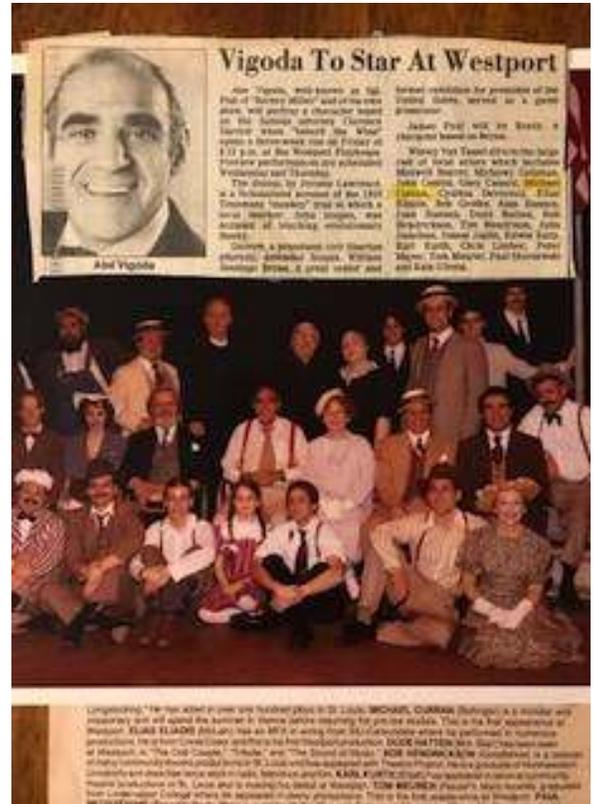
There I was, (second from right, first row), a young man, about to cut short the summer of '84 theatre season. Why? Well, I had been invited to spend the summer in Vienna, primarily in Eastern Europe, smuggling bibles behind the Iron Curtain. That was to be my summer acting experience, posing as a tourist in east-bloc countries!

I had read the book *'The Persecutor'* by [Sergei Kourdakov](#) and for some years thereafter dreamt of smuggling Bibles to those who needed them behind the Iron Curtain.

The Smuggling Operation

That '84 journey started in Vienna. The organization was called Eastern European Outreach (EEO) and they worked secretly. A friend had introduced me to Jeff Thompson, (the start of a 33 years and counting friendship), who invited me to join their team based in Vienna, Austria. Besides Vienna they had offices in Holland, Germany, and of course sunny California! A small town outside Vienna was the actual base where bible smuggling trips were planned and prepared.

The large warehouse in Vosendorf, just to the southwest of downtown Vienna, served as the garage and bible storage facility. Normal vehicles were converted to transport books and bibles in fake floors and hidden compartments. This was to hide the precious cargo of God's Word, forbidden in the communist world. That was base camp then, 1984.



My visa to Romania in 1984 ruled by the dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu.

Dreams Fulfilled

This time however, our July 2017 trip started in Kyiv, Ukraine, now a separate country at war with Russia. The new EEO is now called Mercy Projects and their primary field office is in Kyiv with the headquarters in California. After my time with Jeff in Ukraine we visited Vienna and the old bible smuggling locations.

The homes used to house the staff are still there in the nice community of Modling. Today the main home, which housed the offices, is completely remodeled as a million dollar home. --->>

As I reflected, the homes and structures needed to help people are always needed. The type of help or ministry however, changes over time. Mercy Projects has adapted to these changes and so must I.

The smuggling dreams I entrusted to God, which He allowed me to fulfill in the days of communism, like the Iron Curtain and Soviet Union, is now gone. Many other things have changed since then, but then much has not. People in despair still need hope and purpose; and people still dream, which God loves to fulfill if they honor and serve His purposes. Dreams, new dreams are required again and thankfully given by God anew.

Lena's Dream at Hearts of Love

In the midst of suffering in Ukraine lies a small regional town called Konotop near the Russian border. There is a building in Konotop also built of dreams. This building, a center called "Hearts of Love," was inspired by a dream in the heart of Lena Yuschenko to believe God for a building to assist the handicapped and "special needs" children in her community. *(Lena pictured here with Irina Skrypnik – CEO of Mercy Projects Ukraine to her right.)*

When the Iron Curtain fell, it was as a dream ends: suddenly, unexpectedly. Mercy Projects seized that opportunity to move eastward from Vienna into Ukraine. Today an all Ukrainian staff works to transform the lives of at-risk children and that work has birthed a new dream in my heart.

In Konotop I saw a formerly dilapidated building nearly 90% restored and serving as an oasis of love and ministry to help families with disadvantaged children. Lena believed God to do a miracle and He did, bringing Mercy Projects alongside to make her dream come true.



God is still in the business of giving dreams (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17), of making dreams come true. My dream did in 1984, and now it continues by working with Mercy Projects to help those less fortunate than us. The kids in Konotop have no one else to help them.

\$10,000 Still Needed For Playground

The new addition to the center will allow them to assist over 50 handicapped children in daily classes and therapy. All services are provided free to the community. Mercy Projects supports this work with volunteer donations. All that is needed to complete the project is \$10,000 for the playground area and landscape.

I hope you will join me to make this dream come true for these special kids.

Mercy Projects Camps For At-Risk Kids

Back in 1984 we were bringing bibles and supplies to help the people of Eastern Europe. As my recent trip began in Kyiv, however, I was so impressed by how that has changed. From the moment Jeff and Yuri met me at the airport, their servant heart and commitment to the people of Ukraine was obvious. The Ukrainian staff knows the language, the culture, and work tirelessly to help their own people. I felt "at home" and my acquaintance with the office staff shed new light on all the work behind the scenes.

Besides the trip to Konotop, we also journeyed about an hour to the Mercy Projects summer camp where kids are brought from all over the country to spend a week at camp. They have fun with other kids in a wide variety of scholastic and athletic activities and of course hearing and learning God's Word. Pictured at right I am enjoying a great snack of corn on the cob with two little girls. (Just a little salt is their custom).



Sponsorship Makes A Difference

We all have dreams, however there are also dreams that God places in our hearts and mind. Our time in Vienna brought me full circle to see God working in my own life over all these years. Vienna is not what it was in 1984 though in some ways it was quite the same. And so it is with our lives.

I hope with this story that you will reflect on your own past, and be reminded of God's goodness. I also hope that this will motivate you to seek Him for new dreams to advance His Kingdom. That is what God has done for me on this trip.

For starters, we will sponsor an additional new family there, and start a new sponsorship journey with MP to assist needy families to realize their own dreams. Further, it is my



aim to assist in raising the funds to complete the Konotop construction project. I am challenged to have this new dream and trust God to see it fulfilled prior to my return later this year.

In Closing

Jeff and I visited a family (Oksana and her two children) in a very small 1-room apartment. The kitchen and bathroom were shared with other residents in this communal living building. We sat on the bed while Oksana shared with us about her life. It turned out, the Center at Hearts of Love is a lifeline of support for her. Her children participate in the various programs there, which include physical therapy, individual coaching, a sensory room and group activities. Oksana also attends bible study and meets with other mothers in the same place in life.

Generous sponsors at Mercy Projects support Oksana's family of three. I asked her why the large, lovely picture so prominently displayed? 'Oh,' she said, 'when I get discouraged, or down, or my children get discouraged, I tell them to forget this place – it is humble to say the least, and dream of a beautiful place and go there!' Escapism? Hardly.



I want to be like Oksana and see where God may want me to go, and ask God to show me and give me a new dream for the sake of His kingdom. Over the next months and years I am trusting God to enable my wife and I for the resources to continue our financial support of MP. We desire to spread God's love through the work of Mercy Projects in Ukraine and beyond. I hope you will dream with me. Do not rest content. Give Him the glory and request of Him a new dream. May God move you, inspire you and fulfill all the dreams He has for you!

Epilogue



¹I would be remiss to not declare other dreams God had put in my heart in those days, now fulfilled. I oft recall babysitting for Jeff and Paula and reading stories from Readers Digest to Lindsey and Joel back in 1985 / 86. Of course my own dream as a single man was to one day have a wife/family of 6 or 8 perhaps and have the joy of raising them in the ways of the Lord. And I dreamed of a career, any career that would afford

me a lot of time at home with the kids. Well, a construction management career has afforded the latter fulfilled and January 2015 marked the first of 5 weddings (won't be 6 or 8) for Mary and I when Shannon married a wonderful young (Above from left: Rebekah, me, Shannon, Christian man (Benjamin Pinder) she met in college.

Ben, Mary, Brendan, Ryan, Rachel)



*Somehow I also finished a Divinity dissertation at St. Andrews, Scotland. Finally, this time last year marked a return to California to visit Jeff and Paula after more years than can be remembered with a portion of my dream in tow to kick-off the final year of my son Ryan's college soccer career. I believe this is the first of what shall be 2 Epilogues to my life, to the Glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom partnering with Mercy Projects. Let's create 'epilogues' together now shall we?
(At right L to R: Jeff, Rachel, me, Ryan, Mary, Paula)*