

Potatoes, POTATOES! An illustration of Rom.8:28

By Carol Barnes

Operation Blessing blessed Indianapolis in October of 1995 with a double semi full of potatoes. They called every church with a food pantry to come and get as many bags as they needed. At first I ordered 10 bags, knowing that we would have at least 10 families who would come to our pantry in 2 weeks. Then I thought of my elderly English students, recent immigrants from Russia, for whom potatoes is a staple. So I ordered 30 more bags for them. My husband was gone for the day so I went to pick them up at a nearby church where the semi had parked. When I registered, the organizers pointed to my pile of bags. It looked way too big to carry it home in my car trunk. An acquaintance with a pick up truck noticed my dilemma and offered to transport them for me. He loaded them onto his truck, and after dropping 10 of them off at church, we went to my house. He put the rest in our driveway and left.

When I got out of my car, I got a closer look at the bags. The person who originally called had asked only how many bags I wanted, never mentioning the **weight** of the bags. I never thought to ask. Since I usually bought potatoes in 15 pound bags, I naturally assumed these would be that size. But when I read the label, it said **fifty** pounds!!! I was stunned!!!! Why hadn't I noticed how **big** these bags were? (Uh..... my friend had done all the lifting!!!!!!!)

I did the math. Forty bags times 50 pounds equals 2000! Two thousand pounds equals one ton! I had "inherited" a **TON** of potatoes!!!!!! I felt like the dumbest person in the world!!!! After upbraiding myself over half an hour for stupidity, I panicked!

What in the world am I going to do with all these? ?????? Russians love potatoes but they could never use 50 pounds of them before they spoil. (More than half of my students lived alone.) Taking them to a shelter or mission was out of the question. Every one of them would be loaded with potatoes. I couldn't keep them long outside because of rain and changing temperature. Envisioning a driveway full of rotting potatoes, I began to cry.

Just then, my husband returned. He seemed elated! "Who gave us all those bags of cement out there? We really need a new driveway!" Then he saw my tear streaked face. "What's wrong?" *But it isn't cement!* In a torrent of words, I blurted out my dilemma. "Oh Doug, what am I going to do?"

He had the kindness not to laugh at me, or call me stupid. He simply said, "Honey, let's pray about this." He had scarcely finished praying when the Lord gave a wonderful idea. We would divide each of the 50 lb bags into 3 or 4 grocery bags and go to the Russians' apartments. Most of them lived in one of 3 apartment

complexes. We would first give bags to all my students. Then we would look at the names on the rest of the apartments and leave a bag in front of every one that sounded Russian. Russian names are usually fairly easy to spot ---Igor Vaschislevsky, Raisa Ashtashinsky, etc.

I then remembered that we had recently visited World Missionary Press where we had picked up some Russian Language Scripture Tracts (which started from the beginning about who God is, and how Jesus saves.) We would put one on the top of each bag and pray that the recipients would want to know Jesus.

We had a ball! We knocked on the first door. "Michael, Miriam! Come and see what the Lord gave us!!!!" We took them out to our van packed to the ceiling with big sacks of potatoes. They never saw so many bags "Carol, Doug! Where you get all those potatoes?" We explained that God gave a Christian farmer a good crop and he wanted to share them. We knew that the Lord wanted to bless the Russian with these. So they were really from God! We encouraged them to read the booklet inside.

At one of my students' homes, Felix answered the door, but his wife Sonya had gone shopping with a neighbor who lived across the hall from them.

We had scarcely returned home from the "potato mission" when my phone rang. It was Sonya. "Carol, thank you for the potatoes. I must tell you about my neighbor. On our way home from the grocery, she said, 'Oh, no! I forgot to buy potatoes and I'm completely out.' When we arrived home, she spotted the bag by her door. She looked inside and was shocked to see potatoes---just what she needed. She read the title of the booklet and said, 'This book about God! How God know I need potatoes?!!!!!!'" Sonya was delighted that God in His humorous way just happened to meet her neighbor's need in His perfect timing!

No one was home at Nelli's house. Her 78 year old father lived with her and her husband Rachmiel. We left 2 bags of potatoes with two different tracts. We knew they ^{would} share the potatoes with her sister Svetlana and husband David, and also read both tracts! I had been especially close to this family as I had had all 5 of them in several classes and Doug and I had shared meals with them many times. Three years before, I had been moved to tears about Arkadiy because he had always struggled so hard to learn English, and yet (because of his "old brain") he couldn't seem to get it. One day, taking him to the doctor's office, I had tried to tell him about the Lord. For 20 minutes he didn't understand anything I was saying. Finally when I pointed to the sky he understood that I was talking about God. He mustered half his English vocabulary to say, "God,.....Hegood." It hit me that, though he was ethnically Jewish, he had been raised in atheism all his life, and had been a hardened Russian soldier. And yet, in the short time he'd been in America, he was

beginning to believe that God was not only real, but also good! I was so moved that my eyes misted over and I couldn't see to drive. I had to pull off the road. I said to the Lord, "Father, You know that this man is seeking You. All he knows about You is that You are good. Since he can't seem to learn English, could You find another way to speak to Him and bring him to Jesus?" The best I could do up to that point was to give him a Russian Bible and point him to John 3:16 in it. And I kept on praying that God would reach him--somehow.

Probably 3 years after that incident, here I was-- putting potatoes and a scripture booklet in front of his family's apartment. That afternoon, Nelli called me. "Carol, I find potatoes near our door. You know anything about this?" Though we had written no note, Nelli had guessed who was involved! I was thrilled! But my heart slid to the "basement" because of what I heard next.

"Carol, you know this book in the bag?" "Yes!" I admitted breathlessly. Carol, I can not read this!" I was horrified! More than anything else, I wanted THIS family to understand God's message of salvation. I couldn't imagine why she couldn't read it! She stated flatly, "This book not Russian Language; this Ukrainian!" My heart fell! OH NO! Then I remembered-- I had ordered 300 green Russian tracts and those were the ones going into most of the bags. But this was the white one I had scooped up from a bin during our tour of World Missionary Press because I THOUGHT it was Russian. It was NOT! And now my precious student couldn't read it.

But Nelli wasn't finished: "Carol, my father born in Ukraine. Ukrainian, my father's first language. He read this book and translate to Russian for me!" I stood amazed! When a person reads something in his first language and translates it for someone, he is learning it TWICE. This is the absolute best way that God could help Arkadiy to learn Jesus' plan of salvation. He had answered my prayer of 3 years ago!

I was instantly filled with holy JOY! "Oh Lord, I praise You! I made two really dumb mistakes. And YOU managed to put them together and work something incredibly good out of BOTH of them! Only You could do this! Only YOU!

Postscript. Arkadiy passed away about 3 years after the potato bonanza. His daughter said that, except for the time he was studying English, he spent nearly every waking hour of those last 3 years of his life reading the Bible!!!! He was like a child discovering a whole new world, and he would often say, "Svetlana, look at this! Come, Svetlana, read the Bible with me!" Here was a former atheist who now loved the Lord and His Word with all his heart!!!! I plan to look him up when I get to heaven.