

A CUP OF BLESSINGS

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. [Psalm 23:5]

TRADE SCHOOL OUTCAST – WITH ‘STARS’

After a clash regarding the requirements of the [junior] military education at the end of the first semester, I continued my regular attendance in the trade school to the end of the second year. Although I expected no future benefits from continuing schooling, I felt it was a part of my testimony to let all the interested people and occasional “passerby” know that believers are able and successful, in spite of being persecuted and mistreated.

I think there were only two or three lessons teaching maintenance and use of guns. The instructor brought real military rifles (that apparently were very old) for instruction in disassembling, cleaning and reassembling a gun. The instructor ignored my presence and did not try to include me in any way or degree. I was willing and interested in learning the instructions concerning first aid, protection of people, food, livelihood and property from air raids and bombing.

Another interesting opportunity for a very minimal Christian testimony came my way when the teacher of the Croatian–Serbian language and literature appointed each student to write a report about a book, novel, or story, according to the curriculum prescribed for the second year in the trade school. He appointed me to write an essay about a story describing some awfully immoral traditions and customs in some of the ethnic groups among the Balkan Slavic nations. I hope not to be too ugly, but still clearly describe what the writer intended to bring before the public awareness:

Poor peasants would marry their young daughters to the sons of the wealthier farmers. The farmers’ sons were way too young – still before their puberty. It was a public secret that the fathers of the sons “lived” with their “official” daughters in law.

This teacher was rather fatherly to me, and I never noticed in his manner any intension to disrespect my faith in our Lord. I even noticed some admiration toward me on account of keeping faith while living in an oppressive regime - the

regime openly hostile to godliness. I imagine he selected that story for my assignment to avoid giving an opportunity to some other students to write some nasty report mainly to enjoy the disgusting content of the story.

When I started reading the book, I felt nauseated. I felt sick to my stomach. From week to week I postponed writing my report... The end of the school year was approaching and the teacher had to give every student a grade in literature.

One day he came to my seat and in a subdued low tone asked me, "Have you written your essay?" I softly replied, "I am sorry; I just cannot write about that story... It's so awful..." Then, I experienced something completely unexpected. He looked at me with an expression on his face that seemed like a combination of affection and admiration. He barely nodded three times and slowly turned around, walked to his desk and, in the open book of the students' records, he wrote the highest grade in the column with my name.

After the end of the school year, I received my report card with the best grade in every subject; only in the military education subject there was - nothing.

In the appropriate space in the report there was a note, "The student refused to perform practice with the firearms because of his religious belief and cannot complete the second grade successfully nor pass to the final – third grade."

A few weeks after the end of the school year, the instructor visited my father and confidentially told him that he had no choice because I declared my denial so openly... If I had talked to him privately, he could have tried to cover up and just let me pass as "unnoticed." I do not know if he was honest...perhaps he was.

The usual practice of the military administrators was to recruit all the students after the end of the third or fourth year in most of the "middle" schools. The young men (if they were not college students) were recruited at the same age: eighteen – nineteen years old. I was not recruited during the first five years. Was that because the instructor intentionally failed to send my information to the Military Department, or because I had not attended the third year class and my evidence was not automatically forwarded to the Military Department? I know not... Years passed; my recruitment invitation did not arrive until some six years after my "farewell" to the trade school...

CITY LIFE WITHOUT A STATUS AND QUALIFICATIONS

After the loss of the apprentice status, and over the next six years, my very limited income was a patchwork of working wherever and whenever I had any opportunity to labor and earn some income. Most of my time was divided between my father's cabinet shop and watch-repair for friends, neighbors and affiliated believers. My parents were very supportive and encouraging to me, and never rebuked me for my minimal contribution to the family budget.

The revelation that followed my little testimony in the trade school did not eliminate my serious need for strong faith and inner transformation...some events indicated my frailty in my daily practice of the Gospel faith.

In those days the membership of the local Nazarene Christian Church numbered close to two hundred. There were some twenty converts – mostly young girls, a few middle-aged women and only two elderly ladies. On the men's side, there were two or three middle-aged men. There were only two teenagers on the men's side: one was my close friend from a village just across the river and about ten - twelve kilometers upstream; the other one - myself.

My friend's parents attended the same Church meetings and the two of us had the joy of seeing one another regularly. He was only a few months older than I. Often we discussed our understanding of the preaching we heard that morning, as we walked from the meeting place to my family's dwelling and continued talking at home while my mother and sisters were preparing lunch. Frequently, we would sing some of the familiar Christian songs. We had a very pleasant time together.

One morning after the meeting, as the two of us were walking along a boulevard toward my family home, we noticed a large group of people briskly walking behind us and getting closer. Some cheer-leaders' shouts from the crowd were reaching our hearing...we quickly entered the open door of a building and waited until the procession passed us; we wanted to see what was passing by.

Some people in the crowd were shouting and clapping hands in an obvious attempt to cheer up the rest. Quite a few were very seriously staring [looking sharply] all around. In the front part of the crowd, I saw a few taller people in costly and stylish suits. I recognized faces I had seen in the local newspapers: they were the high-ranking ministers of the Yugoslav government! Among them, I recognized the dictator! The first surprise was: he was of a very short stature! The

second surprise was: his head looked like a glazed wax figure; like a very professionally fabricated mummy. Next to him was his “wife”; much younger, and with almost as thick a cosmetic mask on her face. They all were dressed in costly garments. This was the first time I saw these men in person; and that, only six to eight feet away from my friend and me...

All of the sensation lasted only a few seconds; but the cheer started catching up with our mood. I quickly figured out how to see them again. My friend and I ran through the building entry and the main corridor, to the small inner yard and through the corridor of the building facing the crossing street. My expectation was that the crowd had to pass by the other building to reach the palace of the local government. Just a few seconds later, we looked at them from a very short distance once more. We both giggled and laughed...

The rest of the day passed as usual: special lunch for our “Lord’s Day”, a singing meeting of about forty to fifty singers, mostly young and some very talented. I walked with my guest to the river where the ship was that took him back to his village. Then the evening came – the time for my prayer for the present night; the time to praise our Lord for the past day...

What was our excitement about? Did we rejoice in seeing a bloody man and his closest culprits? Were they not responsible for measureless suffering of millions of their own nation and for the bloodshed of about one half of the members – the leaders – of their own Communist Party? Were they not ready to murder anyone just to promote their own dark plans?

What was the reason for joy? Did I allow the crowd to flood my mind with something void of godliness? “O God, have mercy on me! Shamefully, I failed Thee again”...this was not the only time for weeping bitterly. There were many more...

In spite of all of my thoughtlessness, it was the sheer mercy of our Lord that the security and secret service officers did not pay attention to these two teenage believers running and waiting to see the highest members of the government from such a short distance.

Some seven years later, I met a number of (unbelieving) young prisoners imprisoned for some thoughtlessness that did not bring them that close to the

governing officials. Some of them were imprisoned for long years, mainly for saying a few mean, but very realistic, jokes about communist dictatorship.

About a year and a half after the end of the second class in the Trade School, I was baptized and accepted into the Nazarene Christian Fellowship in Novi Sad, Serbia. Even before my baptism, I had a lot of pleasure learning Gospel songs, singing in the youth choir, meeting other believers, and visiting other congregations.

My special delight was in listening to the preaching of some gifted ministers and elders and meeting the faithful prisoners that had just returned to their homes. I anticipated becoming a prisoner myself, and because of my admiration of their experience as witnesses of our Blessed Redeemer, often we would sing together until well past midnight. Then we ate some kind of a snack, and continued talking about their memories from the prisons, until the time came to board the train and return home.

In the meantime – between the love feast meetings – my mind was full of pleasant memories and looking forward to the next delightful time of fellowship and sharing. To the believers in the countries where “freedom of religion” is the law, it might not be easy to imagine how much joy and rejoicing filled my five years being a young member of the Fellowship. I thought that those five years were the happiest five years of my life...I could not have dreamt that the best was just ahead: the next five years – in the prisons. Our Great Shepherd carried me through that time of imprisonment as His little child – in the embrace of His loving care. He made those five years of imprisonment the best five years yet; I am eighty four years old now...

Before I can write more about the prison time, I must take time for prayer and perhaps make some notes, because some sixty years passed since I became a prisoner “of conscience”, and I need to recall so many details. Many events remained in my memory as strong impressions, but some out of the many details faded. Just by sharing these first few details, many forgotten details “revived”...

Five years of frequent, joyful fellowshiping with young fellow believers and older ones, brothers and sisters, ministers and elders--that memorable time was swiftly coming to its end.

Having had the pleasure of being loved and cherished by so many, and having very limited understanding of the Gospel books, the Acts, epistles and the Revelation (and almost no depth of knowledge in the older books), I was ignorant that man-made religion was becoming more and more part of the mutual, denominational teaching in the group of believers I was a member of.

I had no awareness of some fellow believers' suffering and hopeless longing for some comfort, understanding and support. I had no understanding nor compassion for the desperate souls oppressed not only by the outside world but also within the membership. Today, I look back and wonder why I was so much a "happy Pharisee" and a disciple of the "leading and ruling" clique of Pharisees...

During these five years, I found some work as an assistant book-keeper for very modest pay. After a short time, I was promoted to be the supervisor of the department, over twenty book-keepers/accountants, and I was given much higher pay. In less than a year in that position, I was placed on the "black list" of the employees that "do not clap and shout support" when the socialistic speakers end their "fiery" speeches on the "celebrations" organized or directed by the ruling Communist Party. It was only a question of how much time it would take the management to figure out some excuse to get rid of me – the answer was: a very short time.

Most of the time during these five years, I had no steady work. But any time I was "jobless", I had full-time work in my father's shop. It was his small, private business: finish-carpentry and cabinetry manufacturing. After so many years, I am still amazed at the accomplishments of my father in that small shop by the Fish Market in Novi Sad: constant savings, combinations, and help to the needy.

PREPARATION FOR MY DEPARTURE

When I was twenty and three years old, I finally reported to the Military. If anyone reported against me that I was not recruited for so long, I could have been judged by the military court and sentenced to a few years of imprisonment for avoiding the "obligatory military duty." In the "official opinion" of some local Nazarene ministers, imprisonment for something other than the "refusal of armed training" was a dark spot or disgraceful blemish on a believer's testimony.

The last month before my recruitment date, my mother and sisters were preparing for the farewell feast. My departure was scheduled for September twenty and third, early afternoon. It was the first day of the week, and also the first day of my first week away from my parents' home and from the Church I trusted with some childlike confidence.

It was decided in our family, and agreed upon by the Congregation, that our farewell feast was going to be on the Lord's Day just one week before my departure.

It was a wonderful time for me; a memorable time. Young brothers and sisters, young ministers, and some recently-released prisoners, traveled long hours by trains and buses to be present in our local meeting hall. We joined in singing praises to our Lord, Scripture readings, prayers and inspiring messages.

We shared abundant meals at noon and at dinner time, and returned to the meeting hall for singing until the time that our visitors had to board their trains and buses – about two hours after midnight.

A strong and meaningful message was expounded from the *Epistle to the Romans 8:16-18: The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

More encouragement followed from *2 Corinthians 4:16-18: For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

About two hours after midnight, we had to end our delightful fellowship. Among us were two young sisters that had two brothers in prison at that time. All four belonged to a family in a very remote, small congregation. When the parting greetings began, the two sisters embraced one another and wept, unrestrained.

Now the two would return to their remote village and wait for their two brothers to return someday. I know not if any face remained tearless at that moment.

The last words of parting salutations and blessings are exchanged...some words were just a whisper...mutual embracing in Christian love and affection, and then, parting – but only in the flesh. The trustworthy promise of our Lord Jesus Christ remains with us: *I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* [Matthew 28:20]

DEPARTURE

On September 23, 1963, after the morning meeting and the final simple meal in my parents' home, I went to the railroad terminal where a larger group of recruited young men were already waiting for the train to take us to the Kosovo province, where the garrison to which we were all assigned was located.

My parents and siblings, along with a few other members from our local Congregation, were standing in front of the building waving farewell to me. I was standing inside one of the train wagons, by an open window – waving back to them until the train entered the first curve of the tracks, and we lost sight of one another.

I moved away from the noisy recruits to an almost empty wagon to enjoy the pleasant echo of songs, Scripture sharing and prayers that were still fresh and lively in my mind. I was not alone: the beauty and abundance of our Lord's Gospel was with me as I observed beautiful country sights while the twilight was becoming a dark night -- revealing stars way up high, and fireflies down along the train.

IN THE MILITARY SERVICE

At about two in the morning, the train stopped in Vučitrn – Kosovo Polje. [Translated into English, the village name is Wolf-thorn and the province name is Field--of some black birds larger than sparrows. They fly in large numbers and cause a lot of damage to vineyards and orchards.]

A lower-ranking officer was waiting for the new recruits at the railroad terminal. He led us to the garrison, where we spent the rest of the night sitting around a large table, trying to sleep by leaning on the table-top...

When the dawn made the objects and buildings visible, I walked around to see where I was... I think it was a few minutes before seven, when a trumpet sounded the garrison commander's entrance. The soldiers all over the large fenced yard responded to the trumpet signal by standing at attention and looking toward the commander as he walked from the gate to his office. Now I knew where his office was.

Later that morning, I entered the same building and walked upstairs. On one of the few doors was a sign: COMMANDER. I knocked on that one. Beside the commander were two other high-ranking officers: assistant commander and Communist Party secretary. The Commander said, "Hi, new soldier, what is your need?" I replied, "I am a Christian... I cannot participate in any practice intended for endangering or destroying human life. My presence here in this uniform is only a waste of time. I'd like to make a written statement so you can start the legal process without delay and move me away from the rest of the soldiers."

Their eyes grew much larger. The commander repeated my words as if he wanted to be sure I really said that. They looked at one another, and the commander answered, "We'll contact our superiors, and let you know what should be done." The next day, I was invited to the same office. The same three men were there, and the commander told me, "Our instruction is that we do not open any process until you actually commit the crime." I thanked them for telling me and left the office.

Every day, the new soldiers were learning how to handle grenades and small bombs, how to disassemble, clean and reassemble guns, and how to respond to air raids... Most of the time, I was idle. After giving instruction for that day's lesson to the soldiers, officers would leave them to practice and take time to preach to me. I think each one of them had to make a report to the military court against my "crime," and it was their duty to try to persuade me not to "suffer needlessly."

Some of them walked with me some distance away from the soldiers, and in a lower, confidential tone told me, "I do not understand why any government would imprison an honest citizen; there are so many things you can do – other than the training with firearms." I replied, "I know in some countries the

governments and laws offer that opportunity.” I didn’t say to him: No communist regime makes that possible yet.

SECRET LIBRARY

Before my recruitment, I made a wooden chest with a secret compartment. In my father’s shop, with all the hand tools, it was an easy task. When I finished the chest and painted it, I took apart a small Bible book. Each section contained a portion of some twenty leaves – forty pages. I did the same modification with a Christian song book. That was my secret library. In case I was caught reading one small portion of either book, I would still have the rest to use as my Manna...

I had a pocket New Testament which I left in the chest with other items – not hidden. I am very impatient to share our Savior’s wonderful grace with you: during the five years of my imprisonment, not a single section of my precious books was snatched from me; none was ever discovered by the guards or any prison authorities.

Some other important items I took with me in the chest: one postcard – stamped and addressed to my parents; and a few beautiful apples.

The first few days, the officers were instructing the soldiers and did not bother me much. Only once or twice daily I was called to a lengthy private talk with each officer that was teaching that day. None of them behaved cruelly; they were almost kind.

HANDYMAN

As I walked along within the garrison fence, I noticed some damaged doors, broken windows, and worn-out locks. I went to the main office again and told them, “I see you really need some repairs around here... If you can give me some tools, nails, screws and materials, I can repair a few things...” So, I became an unofficial maintenance technician. I think they were surprised again...

MY “CRIME”

Before the end of the second week in the garrison, a stage and the surrounding area were being prepared for the “Solemn Promise.” This was the label the socialists gave to the act of taking the oath and signing up for receiving a rifle.

Before the communist dictatorship, the old oath in the country was to the monarch. Then, it was replaced with the “Solemn Promise.” I think the Communists changed it because the original oath had a religious reference – especially the words “So help me God”...

The big date finally came. The large stage was erected in front of the main office building. All the new soldiers were aligned in two lines about a hundred fifty feet from the stage. Behind the lines of soldiers were a big shelf and a small table with a huge book. The representatives of the local government, the Communist party, the military musicians, and the commanders of the garrison stood on the stage.

The commander gave a speech. I mainly memorized one sentence—“This is a very serious patriotic duty of every man in our Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. We are here to learn the most efficient way of destroying every enemy threatening our liberty...”

After clapping hands to mark the end of the speech, the soldiers were instructed to say “I,” then each one to say his full name, and repeat every word of the “Solemn Promise” the commander was going to recite. I turned around and walked away as soon as he said, “I.” I did not want to give them an opportunity to tell me, “Dejan, you promised...” I don’t doubt the soldiers and all the people on the stage noticed my leaving the formation...

I went up into the dormitory, sat on my chest and read the pocket New Testament. By the long applause I heard through the window, I perceived the “Solemn Promise” was over. A moment of silence followed, and then the military brass band played the national anthem.

Afterwards, the soldiers, officials, musicians and officers all joined their hands in an ancient dance, and sang some modern socialist lyrics... Soon, I heard a soldier shouting my name. I looked through the window to hear, “The captain ordered you to return to your place in the lines.” So I did. The two lines were now turned in the opposite direction to face the big shelf with the rifles, and the table with the (now open) big book. The captain instructed us, “When you hear your name, march to the gun racks to receive your rifle.”

When he finally called my name, I was ready to “commit my crime,” as the commander told me the first day... I did not march. I said with a voice loud and

clear: "I declare that I am a Nazarene Christian, and it is not for me to neither threaten nor harm human life or safety." The two soldiers next to me turned toward me, the next two leaned a little forward, attempting to see me, and the rest made a half circle. Many voices repeated the same question: "What did he say, what did he say?"

The captain frantically stretched his arms, and softly but urgently kept repeating, "Back to your places! Back, back, back to your places!" He quickly restored the order, and then looked toward me. "Dejan Jevremov, come here!" I marched to the big open book. He handed me the ball point pen, "Sign here!" I looked carefully, read my name, and drew a long line across all the columns. I drew two crossed lines in the space for the "soldier's signature." Then, I placed the pen on the book. The captain looked at my "signature," and then back at me. "You won't," he said. I replied, "No, I won't." He said, "Return to your place in line."

MORE "PREACHING"

The days following, the officers' persuasive talks with me became more intensified with urgency, but still far from any danger of cruelty or rough force. Only once the commander said to me, "Dijon, do you really believe that **we cannot make you accept your gun?**" Without any previous plans or hesitation, I replied, "Comrade Commander, would you dare? If you could manage to destroy my mind and heart, whom do you expect me to hit with the bullets?" He was much bigger and stronger than me. Instantly, his face and neck turned red. After the first surprise, he said, "No, no, no... I don't mean anything, really... I just say..." I replied again, without plan or hesitation, "And I, just answered your question."

Many years later, I would sometimes think, I should have been more restrained, more respectful... Today, I wonder if they would have considered restraint as my being fearful of them and my faith being shaky.

Just a few days before my arrest and imprisonment, I experienced something that I am surely unable to tell you precisely, word for word. This is the best I can recall the event that happened so long ago.

In the dusk of a peaceful evening, as I was leaving the dining hall with the other soldiers, a man obviously older than the rest -- even older than me-- joined me in walking toward the dormitory. He turned to me and said, "I admire your strong

faith, and courage to suffer for your faith... I am here the third time... I am a Muslim... Twice already I got so malnourished that I was too sick to continue... You see, I don't eat pork. And here, all is defiled with pork fat."

Before I was able to tell him how some of my ancestral brothers prayed and strove to keep themselves from eating unclean food, I heard a voice behind us, "Soldier, soldier!" I looked left and right and the voice continued, "You, you that are turning left and right!" A tall, slim man between thirty and forty years old was standing in the twilight motioning with his arm. "Come here!" He was in civil garb...

Considering the way my Muslim fellow soldier briskly walked away, I could see that this civilian was not unknown to him. As I was walking toward this dark man, between the dining hall and the back side of the main office, I could see that the first floor of the building had neither windows nor doors - except the one now open - in which my caller was waiting for me. As I approached him, he asked, "Are you the one that refused arms and the training?" "Yes, I am the one," I replied. He motioned with his hand, "Get in!" It was a narrow, long passage all the way to the opposite side of the building and to the left all the way to the corner. Both parts of the passage were lighted with only one dim light close to the center of each part. About fifteen feet before the end of the passage, there was a door. The man opened it, and ordered me in. A strong electric light was under the ceiling in one corner. On the floor under the light was a stool similar to a simple bar stool. I think it had no footrest.

Now I was able to see the man's dark curly hair and larger than average dark eyes. He offered no introduction, and his manner was rough and commanding. I think he wanted me to fear him. I wonder if he actually had some fear of me. He ordered me to sit on the stool. He sat behind a large office desk in the opposite corner.

For the first few seconds, I could hardly see his face. I later figured out the right angle of looking at him, in order to see him as clearly as necessary to read his facial expressions.

One of his questions was, "Do you realize that Yugoslavia would still be under Hitler's [German - Nazi] occupation if all our citizens believed what you believe?" My spontaneous reply was, "I do not believe any part of your theory. It

is contrary to all you teach the children in Yugoslavian history. If all the Yugoslav population believed what you preach, Hitler could have been the ruler of this country today. Compared to the German war techniques, Yugoslav troops were almost helpless. On the other hand, if all the people believed the Holy Scriptures, there could be neither Nazism nor a Hitler.” I wondered if he was angry because he was not able to prove his position, or because I dared to present so openly some of the government’s misrepresentations of the history. The fact was, he was very angry.

He told me, “It is only natural for a man to defend his own family. We are a people’s government. We do not attack any other country, ever!” I looked at him, wondering, did he really believe that? I answered, “You do not dare to attack any other country because you are weak! If you had superior military power, not even other Communist countries would be safe! What did the Soviet military units do in Hungary? They drove tanks over live people! What have they done in Czechoslovakia? Is that freedom? Is that liberty? Is that what you named the ‘will of the people’?” He jumped behind his desk, yelled profanities, and slammed his desk with his fists, but he did not come closer to me.

He decided to change the method of his persuasion. “How many members do you have in your group?” “I don’t think we ever numbered our fellow believers,” I replied. “But it is obvious that you are a very, very small minority. The whole educated world does not believe as you do,” he said. I told him: “I believe the wise people were always a minority”. “You think just because you are so few that you are all wise?” he yelled. “If you start teaching the most foolish things, there will be some people that will believe you!” I retorted: “Isn’t that how Communism began?” He exploded in another outburst of anger. I had no way of explaining my reasoning to him. Believing in Marx’s theory that in a whole nation, or an entire federation or empire, without faith in God and His Word, everyone would work as much as each one is able, and all would consume of the mutual accomplishments only as much as they need – that is a great utopia, and a foolish, false religion. The difference between capitalism and communism is, in communalism the capitalist is the dictator, or in the best case, the government is the capitalist.

After a few silent minutes, he started another verbal offensive. Every argument of his was met with my direct disagreement. It might have lasted some six to

seven hours. The stories I heard before, about headaches coming on because of the strong light over my head, and pain in the legs from hanging long hours without support, did not materialize in my experience. I did not feel any real discomfort.

Apparently tired, and perhaps frustrated, the officer of the military secret police said with some resignation in his tone, "I see that talking to you is just like talking to these walls... You are sitting here only because you have to be here." I looked at him as if I was a little surprised. "I have to sit here? We were just discussing some differences between your theory and my understanding..."

He jumped up and slammed his desk with the last punches of his fists... I only heard the few words he yelled at me right after: "Marš napolje! [Get out!]" It was a very mean – rude – way to order a subordinate person to leave, but I was glad to finally go to bed. It was already about two in the morning.

Our 'little talk' lasted over six hours.

That night, when I had time to ponder over the experience, I had to regret, groan and pray for forgiveness. Our Lord gave me an excellent opportunity to witness for His Gospel to a dead soul, and I wasted it. I may have sounded to him as an anticommunist, or pro-capitalist, or pro-American. I should have been only a Christian. I could have told him, I was born in this country and God has given me many blessings. I am grateful for the multitude of dear memories and I wish to my nation all the best from our Creator. Only, I cannot please the law of the land against the will of the Almighty God. He called me to tell my nation to believe and obey God to be saved. God commands me not to shed blood...

I cannot be sure that man would have allowed me to finish any part of such a presentation... But our God is the Lord of true miracles; yet, I failed Him.

Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!

Only a few days later, I noticed a van passing through the main gate, into the garrison. I guessed it belonged to the military police. I quickly ran upstairs into the dormitory, and from my chest I picked the nicest apple I had, and a postcard already stamped and addressed to my family. The message had been written already: *This day [some space] I have been arrested and imprisoned in [some space]. The Lord is wonderful! Greetings! Grace and peace. Dejan.* I only filled in

the date and the name of the city, Priština, as I read it on the license plate of the van. As the Lord takes care of all things, when I rushed out of the dormitory, one of the trusted soldiers was outside all alone that moment! I handed him the apple and told him, "First time you get the permit to go to the city, walk as far as you can from the garrison and drop this postcard into a mail collection box. This van will take me to the Military Investigation Prison in Priština. Farewell." The soldier's face did not hide his admiration of my excitement--my internship was beginning!

Only a few days later, my family received the postcard. A long time afterward – when their reply finally reached me – I was assured that they did receive my postcard without any delay. Our Lord's goodness and mercy followed me all the days of my pilgrimage; blessed be His Name forever.

MILITARY INVESTIGATION PRISON IN PRIŠTINA

It was a one-floor building with a square yard attached. The courtyard had a concrete floor and a small laundry sink in one corner. The walls all around this courtyard were about sixteen feet tall. I think there were two electric lights or, perhaps, security cameras installed all the way up, next to the top edge of the walls, in two diametrically opposite corners. There was only one door connecting the building to the court yard. The only use of this courtyard that I observed was that twice each day, I was allowed to walk half an hour inside it. I suppose every prisoner was granted that privilege. I never saw another prisoner; I only heard their steps.

In the central part of the building were the prison cells. My cell was a room with two beds, a small table and two chairs. I think there were about five cells in each of the two rows – back to back. All the cells were surrounded with a walkway about ten feet wide. Some parts of the walkway had small windows all the way up under the ceiling. Similar windows were above each cell door. The cells had neither doors nor windows directly to the outside air. I do not remember how the fresh air was supplied to my room, but the air quality was not bad.

From the military police van, they led me to a smaller room where I was ordered to take off my military uniform and to put on the uniform for military prisoners. I

don't remember any significant difference, only I felt better as a prisoner than as a soldier. They then led me to the commander of the prison. He looked like an above-average decent officer of lower rank--a peaceful man.

He told me the basic rules, personal rights, and limits. He instructed me to lock my chest and keep the key with me, but the chest must be kept in his office. If I ever needed something, I should tell the guard and the guard would ask the commander and return his answer to me. If my wish was granted, the guard would escort me to the commander's office and back into my room.

The food was similar to that in the garrison. The mattress was usable – like in the garrison. For every use of the restroom, I had to knock on my door and wait for the guard to escort me to the restroom and then back into my room.

That first night, as soon as I lay down in bed, I was “taken” back into my most enjoyable environment--I was in a beautifully gifted and inspired choir, in a group praying and praising our Lord as in some portals of Heaven. We heard the most nutritious and uplifting Scripture sharing. When the signal for rising up sounded, the last words and melodies were still sounding in my ears. That was the beginning... Who could ever call that suffering?

The next day, I was ready with a plan. Among the other things in my chest (in the commander's office), there were two pieces of linen I was given in the garrison for wrapping up my feet, instead of using socks. There was the pocket New Testament, and a box of Neapolitan chocolate cookies. First, I asked for the box of cookies “lest they grow mold in the chest.” It was granted. I was really hungry for Manna from Above, not cookies.

The next day, I asked for the foot wraps, as my socks had holes and the shoes were rough. The guard returned with the commander's permission to escort me to the office. As soon as I stepped out of my room, I spread my arms and feet and the guard searched me. Then he led me to the office.

The officer pointed to my chest on top of a tall cabinet. I placed the chest on a desk facing his main desk. He was walking back and forth behind his desk, laxly watching my actions. As I opened the chest, the lid was erected between him and me; I don't think he was able to see the inside of the chest. Perhaps he didn't care. The two sheets of linen were on top of the other items, but I couldn't see

the New Testament! There was no time for thinking or for a long search. My pulse instantly galloped! Mercy, Lord! O, forgive me. It was under the second linen! That was His guidance. I lifted up the first linen and shook it for the commander to see. He nodded to approve it. I folded the second linen over the little book, held it firmly and shook it high before his face-- he waved me off. With my free hand I closed the chest, locked it, and laid both linen sheets next to the chest. With both hands I lifted the chest back to the top of the cabinet, and carefully picked up the linen hiding the book. I was ready to leave his office. He opened the door and let me out where the guard was waiting. Two more steps and my plan might succeed, **Lord willing**.

The guard led me to the door of my room where he would search me again, lest I smuggle in something against the rules. The bundle of linen wrapped around my precious little book was in my left hand when I spread my arms and feet for his search. Our Lord kept him from paying any attention to my bundle. He let me in.

I waited a few seconds until I was sure the soft noise of his steps died out, and then I quickly hid the book under the mattress and immediately prepared the hideout for the book. The Neapolitan box with the square shaped chocolate cookies contained four layers separated by some strong papers – the kind of paper used for packing fresh meat rows in some stores. Each layer contained four times eight cookies. I picked up the first layer by the ends of the underlying paper and placed it on the table. From the second layer, I removed only six central cookies and I placed the book in the space where the cookies were; the space was just a little bigger than the book. I returned the top layer back into the box to cover the book.

Now I had the main part of my “library” ready to use at every available time. For the song book I would have to wait. I could not foresee what our Lord was going to do. It happened just a few minutes after I lifted a thundering voice of praise to our Glorious Savior for His mighty grace and goodness, like they did in the Book of Ezra 3:11.

[And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endures forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.]

Of course in this prison, no man could hear a squeak. All my praise was between our Lord and this thrilled little pilgrim. I started with a small song that had only some six stanzas, and I began with the third verse. To my grandparents, my parents, and to me, these were the most cherished lines in that song.

*He who made the water spring from the flinty rock,
Who Elijah food to bring sent a raven flock,
He Who with few loaves of bread fed the weary throng,
Shall He not in time of need prove a Helper Strong?*

When I finished that stanza, I continued with many more – many more than there really were in that song. After the twelfth stanza I didn't number anymore; I just let it flow like a river. Many songs I didn't labor to learn by heart flooded my mind, and the length of many of them was longer than ever before. What a feast! Such a celebration! Blessed is the Name of our Savior! He is with us all the way!

Whenever I would read my little book, if I heard a guard's steps coming towards my door, I would quickly hide the book in the second layer and place the top layer over the second. After a few days, an officer opened the door and looked at me holding the Neapolitan box open and said, "Each time we open the door you are eating these cookies, and yet you are so lean." I think this was his first time seeing the box. I suppose they were talking about my Manna, but they were ignorant of the secret.

They kept me alone in that room for fifty-five days. I think that was their way of breaking a man's spirit. They never discovered my library. Day and night it was a Fellowship as I've never experienced before--the Lord's Day that lasted fifty and five days.

SUDDENLY - A VISITOR!

Their method of breaking my spirit just did not work for them. Every day was just another Lord's Day for me.

Three of my siblings – two older brothers and one younger one—already managed to escape Yugoslavia using our mother's U.S. citizenship. I struggled with that possibility before my commitment to follow our Savior through imprisonment.

Since my recruitment, our mother's desire to move the whole family to the U.S. came to a head. After some delays, fees, taxes, and extra support from the American Consulate in Belgrade (the Yugoslav capital), my parents obtained exit visas for themselves and for my two youngest brothers.

Another thing happened to make me praise our Lord on and on. My mother had told the consul about my recruitment. The ambassador (I think his name was George Kennan) gave a very interesting suggestion. My mother was given a short note in the English and Serbian languages:

I, Dejan Jevremov, declare that I am an American citizen and as such I cannot serve any military establishment of any other country or government.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Signature</i>
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I was not aware of that note, or of any attempt towards my release, until my mother visited me while I was still under investigation.

The ambassador personally assured my mother that if I signed that short statement, and she returned the note to him, he would get me out of the Yugoslav military in a few days. The name of the ambassador G. K. was very influential not only in Yugoslav ruling circles, but all over the European continent.

I perceived that the U.S. policies of "one hand holding a carrot stretched toward the rabbit and the other hand behind the back holding a stick" were very efficient in those days. Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland had managed to break away from the strict and rigid control of the Soviets under Stalin's tyranny. No doubt the other Eastern European countries were dreaming of breaking away, too.

To my surprise, the guard on duty knocked on my door and informed me to get ready. He was going to escort me to my investigator's office because I had a visitor. My surprise was even greater when I saw in the captain's office - my mother. In the less than two months since our parting, she looked much older. Perhaps the long journey from Novi Sad to Priština contributed to her appearing old and exhausted, both physically and emotionally.

The captain informed me that according to the rules, our visit was limited to half an hour. We were sitting in a small triangle: my mother, the captain and me. He was watching us, and listening to every word of our conversation.

After she told me about their progress towards leaving Yugoslavia and flying to Ohio, my mother reached into her purse and pulled out a paper with the short declaration concerning my U.S. citizenship and release from the Yugoslav military. She said, "Our ambassador gave me this paper for you to sign and to return back to him so that he can request your immediate release."

I read the statement slowly and clearly, word by word, to be sure that the captain understood all of it. I returned the note to my mother and said, "I don't like to disappoint you, Mom, but I cannot sign this statement. It implies that I would be willing to serve the U.S. military, which is much more destructive than the military of Yugoslavia." The eyes of the captain grew much wider-- I think he had difficulty believing his own ears and eyes.

If the captain and the other officers doubted my faith before now, I hoped that this testimony convinced them of my sincere faith in the gospel of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. I was grateful for that moment, and am still thankful today. I believe this simple testimony was not anticommunist, nor pro-American; it was plainly a gospel testimony.

Blessed is our Lord God who alone has the grace and might to use one so useless.

My days under investigation were gliding like a smooth stream in a valley. My nights were filled with gospel fellowshiping. My days were feasts from the little book hidden in the box of chocolate cookies, and singing my heart out in praise and adoration of my Lord. His Spirit made my songs endless in a voice that only He could hear.

I do not recall a single questioning session. I suppose they understood everything from the short testimony after their solemn promise. The testimony they labeled as the actual crime of disobedience.

After fifty-five days, a small group of military police aligned me with a group of other prisoners, all handcuffed two by two. They placed us in a train, and we all traveled to Skopje, the capital of Macedonia.

IN ANOTHER PRISON - IN SKOPLJE

The city of Skopje was in ruins after the recent massive earthquake. The military prison, a very old building with huge walls and small windows, was also damaged

and useless. A small, two-floor building in a military garrison was adopted for the same purpose during this time. Until the government decided what to do, this would be our prison. I remained there for about three months.

The winter was very harsh. The temperature fell down to -32 C / -25 F at night and stayed there for a good part of each day. Our room had no heating. Some of the four prisoners smoked. Between the “two-floor” beds, there was room for only two at a time to walk briskly back and forth to generate some heat. We took turns walking half an hour, then waiting half an hour. Shivering was a regular experience.

We were allowed the use of an outhouse only once a day—based on a schedule convenient for the police – not according to the needs of the users. All the rest of the time we used a bucket in the room. We were allowed to empty and rinse the bucket during our trip to the outhouse.

In spite of the very unhealthy conditions, I did not become ill even once. My nights were still beautified and enriched with continuous gospel feasts. One of my outside entertainments was a number of sparrows below our window, on the roof of the first floor. The tiny birds were trying to catch some heat from the winter sunshine. [Luke 12:6] ...Not one of them is forgotten before God.

After three months, when the winter cold became a little milder, I was finally taken to the court for sentencing. It was a mockery of justice, but I was glad to move a step forward in hopes of moving to a real prison.

The longest sentence before my sentencing was nine years. The maximum according to the law at that time was ten years. I was given the maximum. The judge informed me of my right to complain within ten days. I declared instantly, “I am not going to complain--I am leaving that upon your conscience. I would like to make a written statement if that would speed up my transfer to the prison where I will serve my term.” I was informed that that was not an option.

About two weeks later, I was handcuffed to another prisoner again, and a group of us was taken by train to a small island in the Adriatic Sea. The island was named Goli Otok [Bare Island]. It was located between the island named Rab [servant / slave] and the city Rijeka [river].

I do not remember how we moved from the train terminal into the harbor in Rijeka. We, the prisoners, numbered about twenty, and there were about eight police guards. A certain section among the harbor buildings and offices was probably used for prisoners in transit. It was a large room with bars on the windows.

We likely waited just a short time, and I forgot many details. The ship we were placed on was like a black tanker with a large, white name “Izvor” [spring / fountain]. That ship was used to supply drinking water for Goli Otok and the other islands in that part of the Adria Sea. I remember that it was a sunny day.

QUARANTINE

The Goli Otok harbor was probably the smallest harbor I have ever seen in my life. I think no more than two small ships could be anchored there at the same time. This island was like a large cliff in the Adriatic, about three kilometers long and two kilometers wide. It looked like a triangle with a jagged perimeter. The few trees on the island were planted and sustained by men.

I don't think there was a single tree that grew naturally on the island. The only natural vegetation was small bushes, some tall grasses resembling barley or oats, and many tiny plants that looked very beautiful in their blooming season. Besides the prisoners, the prison officials, and guards, the only living creatures I saw were seagulls, swallows, sparrows, rats, mice, small venomous snakes, small lizards, scorpions, hornets, and yellow jackets. Only rarely did I see mosquitoes.

From the harbor we were led to the quarantine. It was a gravel path uphill, not too steep, about two kilometers long. The sun was scorching to me--after not being exposed to it longer than a few minutes daily for almost half a year. My wooden chest [with my secret library] became very heavy. When we reached the quarantine building, I was on the verge of fainting.

We were aligned along the walls of a room, in which was a long table and four benches that were all pushed to one side the room. We were not allowed to sit down. The quarantine official was a middle-aged, tall man that looked better than I would expect for a prison official. His face was almost friendly. He briefly questioned each new prisoner--under which section of the law or for which crime each was sentenced. He noticed that I was almost fainting, and he said in an

almost encouraging tone, “You’ll make it; you’ll be all right...” He did not offer any help.

The routine of life in the quarantine was just like in the main part of the prison. The guards were present all the time, but hardly ever talked or interacted with the prisoners. An older prisoner was the supervisor; he did most of the instructing, commanding, and ruling.

After the breakfast, we dug trenches in the stony ground and moved piles of rocks. I was not able to see any purpose to that work, other than doing heavy manual labor under the hot sun without permission to drink water between the meals — which were about four hours apart. After supper we were allowed to brush our teeth and wash our feet.

Before bedtime, we spent about one hour listening to the reading of the prison rules. During the first reading session to the new prisoners, the supervisor encountered a problem. He could not read the Croatian text because he was Slovenian.

Since none of the prisoners volunteered, he ordered one prisoner to take the first turn, and the others to follow. The first one was almost mumbling. I wanted to learn the rules, so I raised my hand. “Do you have a question?” asked the supervisor. I replied, “May I volunteer?” He eagerly handed me the booklet.

I read loudly and clearly with a strong accent on words like “**You may never...**”, “**Must always**”, “**Punishable**”, “**Forbidden**”, etc. The supervisor ordered me to read every evening. I learned all the rules in a few days.

As soon as we were allowed to sleep, I was back in my feasting at the table of our Lord and drinking from His Fountain. Throughout every night it was the time of fellowship and adoration. At the signal to get up, I still remembered the last words of a song or a prayer. The amazing fact was that in my dreams all the fellow believers were close, loving and loveable. But when I woke up, I could not recall ever knowing any one among them all. Our Savior was in every one.

The usual quarantine time was about one month. I was transferred to the main part of the prison after ten days. I was thankful. Now, I could meet the other Christian prisoners, and that’s an exciting joy.

THE REAL PRISON – CAMP TYPE

All the dormitory buildings were similar in shape and size. The buildings had been built in two lanes at the bottom of a canyon. The buildings were facing one another and between them were flat platforms covered with gravel. Each pair of buildings was separated from the next pair by wide stairs. The back walls of all the buildings were without windows and doors. From the higher end of the canyon to the lower end were some ten pairs of dormitory buildings. Above the highest pair of buildings, and below the lowest pair were also stairs.

Each dormitory was a one-floor building with very thick walls of large stones and mortar; small windows usually open wide year round, concrete floors, and plastered walls and ceilings. About one hundred and thirty prisoners slept on beds of iron, with mattresses made of large bags of jute stuffed with straw. Smaller stuffed bags were used for pillows, but they were more a luxury than a regular accommodation.

The toilets were low sheds with small windows – just holes; no glass. The sheds were very long and the concrete floors had holes along one wall, and a shallow channel along the other wall. At the lower end of the channel was a drain hole. The whole building stunk of decaying waste. There was no privacy of any degree. Toilet paper was not supplied. Some prisoners used small aluminum bottles to wash their “outlet” after each use of the toilet. Personal hygiene was a problem. It would be cruel to keep animals in such conditions.

A wall about four or five feet high and about twenty feet long, covered with terrazzo tiles, was plumbed with about fifteen small faucets. A trough beneath it had a drain hole at each end. The trough was about two feet above the ground. There, the prisoners could wash their faces and feet, shave their faces, and brush their teeth.

Both the toilets and that wall were used by about three to four hundred prisoners. After a few days of using these facilities, I learned when the “traffic” was slow and privacy more manageable.

Every set or two of the dormitories was occupied by one group of prisoners. Over each group was appointed a prisoner as supervisor. The administrative caretaker was a referee that appointed the supervisor and by a “remote control” was re-

educating the prisoners to transform them into solid citizens of the Yugoslav People's Socialist Republic. Above all the referees was the magistrate, with his closest helpers: magistrate assistant, commander of security (mainly over the prison guards), and the assistant commander.

Most of the guards had basic education: reading, writing and minimal math. Some of them were simple men working for their income. A few would rather work somewhere else if they had any skills. I remember at least one guard that was troubled by any injustice or cruelty done to the prisoners, but he did not remain there for a long.

As soon as I was ready to lie on my bed, the Manna from above descended upon my soul abundantly. Our Lord's feast continued on and on through the night. If for any reason I woke up, all I remembered were some beautiful words of a sermon, song or prayer. Our Lord's feast in my deep sleep kept me from suffering from a different feast: numerous bites by the bed-bugs that were enjoying the blood of a new prisoner.

At four o'clock and twenty minutes, a loud penetrating alarm signaled the time for most of the prisoners to rise, dress, and form two lines to walk to the dining room. We were led by the subgroup leader (who was appointed by the referee).

In my mind I was still delighting in the last morsels of Manna as I rushed to dress, run to the toilet and to the wall with the faucets, and back to stand in the lines, lest the rest of the prisoners in my subgroup had to wait for me and utter their nasty comments. Walking in the lines to the dining room was my praise and prayer time.

I tried to ignore the bothersome itching caused by the bed-bugs; I did not want to cause inflammation and infection to my skin, which was not yet used to the strong sunshine.

Tables and benches in the dining room were made of wooden boards. The plates and spoons were made of aluminum. The food preparation process and cooking was of very low quality and hardly nutritional.

My first valuable dietary supplement was juicy stems of the tall grass that was growing in crevices between the cliffs and large rocks. For my Adventist and Muslim fellow prisoners, dietary difficulties were much greater.

By the sheer grace of our Lord and His countless mercies, not once in all the time of my imprisonment was I sick. Many prisoners had a very different experience and on a rare occasion, one did not survive.

Breakfast was about a pound of some dark, hard bread and some black liquid that was officially named “coffee,” but had nothing to do with the real thing. The prisoners named it “black slaves’ sweat.” The bread was named “brick.” I ate a small portion of the bread soaked in the coffee. The rest of the bread I kept in my pocket to nibble when I got too hungry. I had to survive until the end of my shift and until supper time. This proved to be a good practice. An occasional prisoner, stronger than I, would faint on the job. As soon as each prisoner finished his breakfast, he was free to leave the tables and rush to the faucet wall, brush his teeth and join the four line formation of all the prisoners working in the first shift. Walking less than two miles to the shops gave me another opportunity to pray, as the trip was much longer than the one to the dining room. Prayers and praises while walking protected my mind from the pollution of hearing the prisoners’ frequently ugly conversations. The guards often warned the prisoners, “Silence!” Talking in the formation was forbidden. Most likely, the guards did not intend to help me focus in my prayers, but they did anyway.

MY FIRST JOB

Terrazzo tile production was not the hardest work prisoners had on this island. A spacious hall – opened on two sides for the traffic of large equipment – contained electric machines and presses for making the tiles. I was ordered to work between a press and a polisher. My job was to use sand-stone for sanding the edges of the tiles, in order to remove rough residue of cement left by the presses. In front of me was a pile of ten or more tiles. As I was instructed, I took two tiles and sanded the rough edges down. Then, I placed the two tiles on the moving track that went toward the polisher.

I did not hesitate nor waste my time. I worked diligently, but the pile of tiles waiting on me was growing faster. It was obvious that I was not able to work as fast as the position demanded. I just continued as fast as I could. The pile grew bigger. The polisher was waiting for my finished tiles. Soon, a guard came closer. He had a black rubber stick hanging on his belt. After observing my labor and inefficiency, he walked away.

Above the hall were the offices of the managers and the higher ranking officials. The guard returned with a manager. The two were talking softly and slightly shaking their heads as if very concerned for something. Then they left. A few minutes later the guard returned, and with some compassion in his voice asked me, "How do you feel?" I smiled in surprise and replied, "Very well. Thank you." He walked away.

What was going on? The guards do not talk in such a tone and manner to the prisoners. Shortly after he left, one of the higher ranking officials appeared. I perceived that the prisoners were watching. The appearance of a higher official in the dusty hall might mean something special. The official observed my work, shook his head, and left.

The next moment, a prisoner of athletic stature, shape and muscles joined me with his sandstone, grabbed four tiles and sanded them in a few seconds. He did this again and again, and soon the big pile was on the tracks toward the polishing machine. He looked left and right to make sure we were not being watched by a guard, and told me in a low tone, "Don't be such a fool! You are killing yourself! They are not paying you!"

His words turned my attention to his way of working. His sandstone was sliding over the edge of the tiles without much effort. He didn't check if the edge was smooth; it was not important to him. He expedited work without quality. From that day on, this athlete was working next to me every day. Nobody came to rebuke us for the sloppy work. I wondered if there was any quality control instituted.

After supper and a quick visit to the toilets and the faucet wall, I went to bed and instantly entered our Lord's feast hall until the signal for another day. That day, one of the Christian prisoners stopped by my work place and with a very sad face and voice asked me how I was doing. "Thank God, I am well," I replied. He went away.

I think the next day was Friday. Nothing in particular happened during the shift, but at one point, the prisoners stopped working to hear a top official yelling into the telephone in his upstairs office. "What are you waiting for? Do you want this boy to die, and have us be responsible?!!" He used some words that are not repeatable.

I heard his comments and noticed the prisoners pause in their work. When I looked around, the other prisoners were all looking at me. I did not feel that I was dying. I really did not feel anything but peace.

Saturday started as all the other days that week. All the guards, the civilians, the managers and the high officials were replaced by their colleagues. They lived one week on the island, then one week at home. Most of them I saw for the first time. They seemed to take turns watching my work. Some looked very concerned. When I would look at them, they would smile, shake their heads and walk away.

About an hour before the end of the shift I noticed a white cloud moving into the terrazzo hall. What was unusual is that the cloud was covering the floor and slowly filling up the hall until I could see the objects and people like some pale shadows in a dense fog.

Then I heard some singing. I have never heard a harmony so beautiful. The singing was louder and more beautiful as the minutes were passing. I think I worked faster and more vigorously. The melody was so beautiful and the words were like out of the Book of the Revelation. Never before, nor ever after did I hear anything so uplifting, so amazing....so heavenly.

The signal ending the shift reached my ears, and the cloud with the heavenly praise was instantly taken away. I walked to the lines forming to go to the dining room. I don't remember walking the distance -- perhaps I was still in the cloud. Before supper, I had a short time to shave my face. When I looked into the mirror of my shaving kit, I was very surprised. This was not the face I knew. My eyes were bulging out, and my cheeks were deeply sunken. I DID look like a dying man.

FIRST SON-DAY

The next day was my first Sunday (this is the Gentile spelling--it should be "Son Day"). After breakfast, I went behind one of the dormitory buildings, expecting to see some of the Christian prisoners. Soon, one of them came looking for me. That first meeting of another brother in Christ was very exciting and emotional. He led me to a spot in the cliffs where they often met on Son Days.

That first sight of six young believers – prisoners – was for me like a beautiful picture. We embraced with a hearty salutation. This first time together was used for sharing greetings from their families and from their local and neighboring

churches. Greetings were also extended from individual believers, that the prisoners had memorable experiences with, prior to becoming a prisoner.

Then they answered my questions about their experiences in this prison and about their present jobs. Only two of them were married. One had two daughters about three and four years old, and the younger one had a small baby son. Four of them were single. Altogether, there were seven of us believers.

After the fresh news had been shared between us, the conversation flagged. Then I asked them if they had their Bibles and song books, and they told me that they all had both - each in his own language. We were all communicating in the Croatian/Serbian language. One was a Hungarian, one Slovakian, one Romanian, and four of us were Serbian. Most of us came from mixed background and parenting.

They told me that at the present time, nobody tried to forbid reading of the books, and even singing was not rebuked. Soon, I observed varying attitudes regarding this, among the guards and officials.

The time of our first meeting was passing unnoticed, and supper time was approaching fast. Nobody suggested any singing or reading. I asked them how often they met together on that spot, and they answered, every Sunday. "When did you last have a singing?" I asked. They said, "About three weeks ago." "Would you like some singing today?" I asked. "Well, yes, we could," they answered.

We went to bring our books from our chests in the dormitories. It was a very pleasant time - praising our Lord. I suggested we take turns picking songs. Just before the signal for supper, I asked them if one of them would offer a prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord for the joy and blessing of praising Him Who is worthy of hearty adoration. So, one did. Hallelujah! Praise our Lord! My first Son Day was a good, soft beginning.

Monday morning was almost a repeat of the preceding work days, but somehow I seemed to be a little stronger. My strong fellow prisoner worked with me, and the time passed by quickly. The managers still stopped by me frequently to observe my progress or, perhaps, to be sure I was not dying. I worked there two more days, but I never again had the magnificent experience with the cloud and

heavenly praises. Magnificent to me – seemed like dying to them; I liked my part better than theirs. What our Lord grants to us is the best.

MY SECOND WORK-PLACE

Wednesday evening after supper, the prisoners stood in four lines in front of their proper dormitories, waiting for the guards to count them. The supervisor of my group delivered a few letters addressed to the prisoners. Then he pulled a note from his pocket, called my name, and said: “After the counting is completed, take all your personal belongings and go to group number four.” I was being transferred to work in the restaurant that served the officials, managers and guards. That also meant that I would share their diets.

The next morning, I went to work with a small group led by the restaurant cashier. My office was next to the main restaurant building. In front of the office was a terrazzo terrace right on the shore. A wall only two feet high separated the sea from the terrace. About three to four miles in the distance I saw some islands. I was appointed to be the book keeper for this main restaurant, for the prisoners’ restaurant that served snacks halfway through each shift, AND for the prisoners’ Canteen. It would be a lot of work.

The restaurant manager and the chef were new. The former manager and chef were now prisoners in another prison because of some mismanagement--in plain language, for stealing from the restaurant. The former book-keeper, a prisoner, was in another prison. This also explained why I was kept shorter than usual in the quarantine. They needed a Christian for book keeping. Some of their loyal subjects were unscrupulous.

The first day in the Restaurant, I worked long hours and continued after supper. When all the prisoners were gone to the dormitory, and the prison officials went to their bedrooms in the hotel, I turned off the light in the office, pulled the curtains aside and knelt by the large desk to pray and praise our Blessed Caretaker. Under the starry cathedral, my offering soared toward the throne of our King of kings and Lord of lords. Who could dare label that as suffering? I locked the office and walked through the beautiful night toward the dormitory, singing my heart out to our Savior for His wonderful care. Finally, I was singing as

loud as I was comfortable. I do not recall a single time of meeting anyone during my nightly praises.

One might wonder if the Lord's feasts through every night were discontinued since I reached the comfort of reading my Bible copy, and had the joy of singing freely most nights. That wonderful mercy and grace of abundant Manna continued for two full years. When I started the third year, the occurrence became less regular and gradually decreased. By the end of the third year, it was only an occasional experience.

Our Son Day meetings were regular and filled with reading, praying and singing. I had a wonderful time because our wonderful Caretaker carried my soul in His loving embrace like a small child all of that time. I wonder how many officials envied my joy and happiness. Some of them talked openly about it.

Having regular fellowship meetings every Son Day, the life during six working days was not hard at all. My nightly celebrations in the office and on the way to the dormitory were frequently extra blessings. The multitude of stars in the sky was telling of our Lord's promise to multiply the seed of our father Abraham. Rare storms reminded our generation of God's power-manifestation when Elijah was in a cave. The constant hum of the sea waves, just a few steps away from my office door, not only refreshed our memory of crossing the Red Sea, but also confirmed the Truth that our Savior is still leading His redeemed people through this world, to the splendor of heavenly praises. Would anyone name these experiences suffering? Mercy and goodness of our Blessed Redeemer and Master followed us all the days of our pilgrimage... Blessed be His Name forever!

Winter seasons were usually mild and we only had rain showers a few times on the days of our meetings. When that happened, we walked and talked together in an unfinished building. The rain water was trickling in in many places, but there was still sufficient space to walk between the leaks. Often some letters from the families outside brought glad news, and it was shared among us as a dessert.

LAYER CAKE, COOKIES AND A SILENT REBUKE

Expecting visitors was another excitement. Sharing the food brought by the visitors was double pleasure--the giver and the recipients enjoyed delicious tastes

and pleasant aromas of food prepared by our families. Prepared and brought with love and prayers.

Once, two brothers had visitors on the same day. After the visit, Brother Saul brought a much-decorated layer cake to our meeting spot. His wife worked in a layer cake business before they got married. It must have been an especially difficult task to preserve the shape of the cake during the long trip. Saul appeared a little proud of his wife's art and labor, and was very glad to share his joy with his fellow prisoners.

The appearance of the layer cake promised a delicious flavor as well. Saul could have kept it in his chest, and savored it for days – privately, but he wanted to share his wife's kindness and labor of love with all of us. I imagine the appetites of all of us soared high -- the faces were bright with the expectation of enjoyment.

The other brother here was named Mark. He brought some simple peasant-type cookies to share. His family was not wealthy but rather limited in income, and accustomed to living frugally in order to provide for the survival and health needs of numerous children. I don't know for a fact, but I imagine that the brethren in their local church helped Mark's visitor with the cost of traveling to the island.

We used a large cardboard box for our table. The layer cake was in a decorated box – like gift wrap. The simple cookies were in a paper bag. I would think that not only were the cookies simple, but Brother Mark was, also. He just turned his bag with cookies upside down, and dumped the cookies on top of and around the layer cake. Some faces seemed to show that the brothers thought themixing of the cookies with the layer cake looked more intentional than joke.

The giver of the layer cake was very displeased with such disrespect of his wife's fancy dessert, and in a clearly protesting move, picked up the cookies and dropped them on our cardboard table that was almost clean. The faces of all the brothers seemed to disapprove of such pride, but no one said a word.

After a moment of tension, the conversation slowly returned to a regular tone with ease. All of us enjoyed the simple cookies, and expressed our compliments on their taste. No one touched the layer cake. Brother Saul was urging every one, "Help yourself to the layer cake!" One brother said, "Oh, I ate so many cookies...

But thank you very much.” Another replied, “Thank you, it’s beautiful! It must be delicious!” But not one touched the cake.

Soon, the meeting ended. Saul seemed devastated. The rebuke was silent, but to him it must have been very loud. Although the next day, most of us returned to the same cardboard table and almost finished the beautiful layer cake (with obvious pleasure and many appropriate compliments and attributes), Brother Saul felt humiliated for a few days.

We did not have a similar issue again to the end of our imprisonment.

Mark and Saul are not the real names of the two brothers. I changed the names because I think one of the two is still in the flesh, and the relatives of both may not be comfortable with telling this story openly, and in public.

TWO INVENTORIES

At the end of each month, the book-keeper’s job was to make an inventory of both restaurants and the canteen. The amount of food at the end of one month was important to document for the monthly accounting report. The supervisor in the prisoners’ restaurant was George; he had a helper, Steven. George was a Catholic; a very stable, honest man. His sentence was for many years. He had his mother and a sister “out in freedom.” He rarely talked about his family, but in those rare moments I perceived his high respect and reverence for his mother, and a strong affection for his sister. Steven was in the prison for the same crime as mine. His family was also of the same faith. The prisoners’ restaurant was a large hall – a barrack with tables for eating in the standing position. There were no chairs. One corner had an office and place for food storage, along with a refrigerator.

George treated me as a respected friend. Perhaps he realized that I labored to help him. I knew him as a person with a very hot temper, but restrained by the dangers of prison life. His nation was a minority in our country; they suffered very much under the current regime. Once, after the completion of the inventory, I spent a short time in his office. On the wall above the large office desk hung a picture of a worldwide-known American actress. Of her many pictures in the media, this one was the least immoral in my limited observation — it showed only

her head and neck. I don't know if George obtained the picture, or if it was there before he started working in the restaurant.

Seeing my longer glance at the picture, he asked me, "Beautiful woman?" As I continued looking at the unfortunate woman's picture, I asked him, "Would you give me that picture?" Instantly he answered with the tone of a fervent friend, "Sure!" He immediately removed the picture from the frame and handed it to me. My brother Steven looked shocked. Obviously, he had a much higher opinion of my taste and preferences. I asked, "George, are you going to be sad because you gave me this picture?" "Not at all," he replied, fervently placing his right hand on his heart. I wanted to be sure. "Is this picture mine now? Really? Can I use it as I wish?" He almost yelled at me, "Absolutely! Do whatever you want!"

I squashed the paper, tore it into small pieces, and dropped it all in the waste basket. The face and neck of George turned as red as if freshly burned by a scorching sun. My brother Steven was astonished; frozen. I waited a little for George to regain his natural coloring, and then I talked to him slowly and softly as to a close friend. "George,... You have your mother and your sister. Would you like them to be photographed like that, and their pictures to be hanging in offices and rooms of who knows what kind of people?" For a moment, I couldn't tell if he was turning red again. But then he extended his right hand to me and said, "You are right! Thank you." To the end of my time in book-keeping, we continued as very good friends.

Those days are gone, but the memories remain. Thoughts and opinions can change. That could be another inventory of my heart and mind--a more important one. What is the balance of fresh food, what's the residue of old or spoiled, am I profiting or suffering loss? *Second Corinthians 13: 5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.* If George was the book-keeper working on my inventory, if I was depending on his evaluation of my work, would I have mentioned anything to him about that picture? If I would say something, would it be told in a more humble manner? If I was meek, would I have been closer to him and with a clearer view of his soul's needs? Would that different way have been more in the likeness of a Christian testimony of a godly

care for a neighbor whom our Lord has brought to me as an opportunity of sharing the abundance of grace in Christ our Savior? Would a humble manner bring me closer to our great Example? How could I serve my Redeemer better; Him Who gave Himself for me and to Whom I owe all I have and my own self, also? This kind of thinking – prayerfully -- is a more important inventory.

A DARK NIGHT BECAME ONE OF THE BRIGHTEST

Most of the guards were barely literate in the Croatian language; so were many prisoners. Some prisoners were very skillful and quick at confusing the ignorant guards. A small number of prisoners had a higher education level than the highest prison officials (except for the two prison doctors).

Evening report was a regular part of the daily routine. All the prisoners stood in four lines in front of their dormitories. Two to four guards would walk by and count all the prisoners and compare the total number with their record. Often, one counting was sufficient. At other times, the guards had to count again and again. Sometimes they had to call the shops and demand a recounting of all the prisoners in the second shift. The numbers in the prison had to agree with the number in the books, or there would be an alarm.

One dark and cold winter night brought an icy shower. We were standing in lines suffering drops of rain like needles to our skin. We shivered, wet to the skin. Next to me was one of my Christian brothers, Steven. The guards were late. Waiting in such weather seemed much longer than it really was. Finally, two guards came and counted. Then they walked by in the opposite direction, toward their office. The numbers did not agree. The signal for going to bed was postponed. The piercing rain and shivering continued.

Riots in a prison can be very dangerous. The next time the guards came by to count, there were four of them together – not only two. The numbers did not agree again. The prisoners mumbled angrily. The cursing got worse by the minute. How could I plug my ears?

I started praying, “Gracious and loving Heavenly Father, I know our Savior is suffering with us...; perhaps more than we, because of Thy great love in Him. Grant us more awareness of our Redeemer’s presence...” I stopped shivering and did not feel cold any more at all. The night turned brighter than any moonlit night.

The cliffs in front of us and behind the dormitory turned as bright as highly polished silver. But there I was, still standing in the lines; still on the ground...

My brother Steven, still suffering both the weather and the prisoners' anger, watched the five guards trying to count us for the fourth time. Steven looked at me and noticed something unusual. "You are not cold?" he asked. I replied, holding back my tears of joy, "Steven, all the cliffs around us are as bright as polished silver!" "Oh!" he gasped. The same instant, he also was transferred from the icy, stormy rain – under the wings of our Blessed Shepherd of His redeemed Flock.

The guards walked back into their office, and a few minutes later we heard the signal. Finally the numbers were in good order. My joy in that experience continued... *2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

A SURPRISING VISITOR

My memory is not perfect in remembering the precise dates of some memorable experiences. I think before the end of the second year, I wondered how the plans of my parents and my two youngest brothers were unfolding. I had not received a letter from my family for some time and I could not be certain if they were still in the old country, or already in America.

One Son Day, we [the prisoners] were in our usual meeting place among the cliffs and rocks, when a prisoner [not a believer] came to us breathing hard and said, "Dejan, hurry up to the guard's office; you have a visitor." That was a surprise -- I did not expect any visitors in those days. I rushed to the office. The guard telephoned to the gate and sent me to the visitors' building by the little harbor. Wondering who my visitor could be, I sped up to the building and reported my arrival to the security officers.

A guard escorted me to a small room where my father was waiting. Two years had passed since I saw him last time. He looked older - many years. His hair was white and his back slightly more hunched. The hands that labored many long years in

often turbulent and dangerous times to support his wife and eight children, those hands, still seemed healthy. He walked briskly and with certainty.

His life was so wrapped around his family—completely invested in our wellbeing and prosperity. I cannot be sure what a greater burden was for his heart and mind: seeing his grown children leaving one by one and going far away into the unknown world, or leaving his business, his fellow believers, and one son in prison in the old county under socialist dictatorship.

He told me that all was just about ready for my mother and the two youngest brothers to fly to our mother's birth state – Ohio, US. He was thankful for the successful sale of most of their limited real estate, his equipment, and materials. They had their flight tickets already paid, and the flight date reserved and confirmed. This was the last time we'd see one another face to face. If we met again, it might be on the other side of the Atlantic, or, way above all the partings, sighing, groaning and tears – in the realm of everlasting adoration of the Lamb of God our Creator and Savior.

The visiting time passed quickly. The first meeting in the prison and the last meeting on that side of the ocean was over. We embraced one another and shared final greetings that were more like prayers to our loving and caring God. Greetings were sent to the believers in the old place and across the great sea. My father's desire to see once again one of his eight children, was granted and fulfilled; perhaps the last time in his earthly journey; praise to our Lord.

He walked toward the long black tanker, Izvor, to return to Rijeka. I rushed to my office in the restaurant, from where I could see him on the ship. I waved to him and he waved back as the tanker moved slowly backwards to exit the little harbor. Once in the open sea, the tanker turned about a hundred degrees to take the direction toward Rijeka. I watched my father as he ran toward the rear of the ship. It was too far for me to hear anything, but his steps "sounded" to me as the first shovels of sand falling on a coffin that would soon be covered from human sight.

I think at that time our parting was more grievous for him than for me. I quickly closed my office to weep my heart out to our loving and compassionate Comforter. Now that I am eighty and four years old and some of our children and grandchildren are so far away, I think I can feel more of his grief he had so long

ago. Now it is my turn. God's will be done. Can we count or measure the blessings of looking forward to the fulfillment of our blessed hope in Glory; He Himself will reward us abundantly for all that He Himself has done in our earthly journey?

STELLA ALEXANDER

In the year 1963, September 16th, just a week before my recruitment, a teenage daughter of a believing couple from another city came to visit with my family. She was like a guide to a lady from England. The lady was driving a small Volkswagen car with a foreign license plate and a sticker "D," which I think meant "diplomat" or "under diplomatic international protection." The lady's name was Stella Alexander.

Ms. Alexander was a middle-aged person. She was working for Amnesty International, a department of the United Nations. Stella was a descendant of a Quaker group, but her garments did not indicate anything of the past customs. In Yugoslavia, Stella was collecting information by visiting families of peaceful political and religious prisoners.

At that time, I remembered only a few words in English and a few more in German. Some of the recently released prisoners were also visiting that last Sunday, and they apparently had some knowledge of English. Stella's young guide also learned some English in her school. It was a limited conversation; more like establishing a contact – a relationship.

About ten years later, when I was living in Akron, Ohio with my wife and three children, Stella came to visit. She wanted to see how some of her clients resettled after the release from prison and escape from Yugoslavia. Her visit came about the time when I would have been released from prison after serving the ten years I was sentenced to.

During the first year of my imprisonment, U.S. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and the vice president, Lyndon Johnson, became the new president. Lyndon Johnson's administration enacted the program "The Most Preferred Nation." According to that program, any nation applying for a long term/low-interest loan from the U.S., would have to implement some improvements and laws guaranteeing more democracy than the socialist governments used to have.

That prerequisite included the better treatment of Christian prisoners. In the process of diplomatic discussions between the U.S. and the Yugoslav governments, a U.S. delegation visited Yugoslav representatives in Belgrade. A public meeting with journalists and TV cameras was organized. Both sides presented their pleasure of witnessing achievements and readiness to sign the historic document/agreement.

Yugoslav representatives reported on the constitutional rights and freedom to believe, speak, and practice any religion. These rights were guaranteed to all the people in Yugoslav “democracy.” When the time for the journalists’ comments and questions was announced, Stella asked for, and was granted, the opportunity to present some of her evidence. She read in detail the names and ages of the Christian prisoners, their family members, the length of their sentences, and the “crimes” they committed. I imagine it must have been a “bomb” in the face of a typical socialist government misrepresenting the real situation and conditions.

The U.S. representatives declared good will to allow more time for the Yugoslav government to bring the facts into compliance with the requirements for the status “Most Preferred Nation.” The loan agreement had to wait.

In my third year in prison, I received an official document: “By the decision of the government, the sentence – imprisonment term – of Dijon J... has been changed from ten to five years.” Some of my fellow Christian prisoners were instantly released, and the rest received similar statements as I did.

SHORTENED PRISON TIME AND SOME NEW CONCERNS

My siblings and some other believers that managed to migrate to the U.S. had a number of disagreements with the Nazarenes that migrated decades before my generation. A thought of joining my generation in the U.S. frequently occupied my mind. For a number of years I had planned to visit the U.S. I wanted to help the earnest and willing believers establish a Scriptural order of their fellowship. Perhaps I could also earn some money and then return back to the old country.

I desired to get a self-teaching book-- English as a Second Language. I also considered getting another job that would make it possible for me to learn English. When one of my fellow prisoners had visitors, they brought a book,

“English in Hundred Lessons.” That was an excellent book. My believing relatives in Novi Sad endeavored to give the book to some visitors.

Another visitor brought a package of food and desserts for me. Because he was a former prisoner on the same island, and also was not my close relative, the visitor was allowed only a handshake and a few words; total time – a few seconds. The few words we shared had the depth of a sermon, “Greetings my brother! The Lord bless you and keep you for the Heavenly Kingdom. All the brethren salute all of you.” The visitor was taken to the waiting room, and I was left with a guard to check the package for me.

Among the other desirable items was a small pocket New Testament that some nominal churches give to the recruits in the U.S. The guard took the Book and casually flipped the pages. He was a man of less than basic education. I imagine he had no idea how precious that Book was to me, our Lord’s Word in English. He probably thought it was a dictionary. In a way it was!

I rushed to the camp, eager to open the Book – first time in English. I was in the first part of my learning English, and I wanted to see if I could already understand anything. As soon as I secured the desserts in my chest, I went to a secluded spot in the cliffs, pulled the Book out of my pocket and opened it. I glanced at **John 17:25 - O righteous Father...** The same moment there was some commotion close to my spot, and I quickly slipped the Book into my pocket. I did! I understood the words! A shower of blessings flooded my soul.

Why was it so splendid? I can’t really explain. After all these years, it is still exciting to remember and think about that moment. From that time on, whenever I felt that the Serbian translation was unclear to me, I would compare it with the English text. That was such help. Now, what could be my next job, and how to obtain it?

WHAT I CANNOT – OUR LORD CAN

Matthew 19:26 with God all things are possible.

I figured I would still be young enough to be subject to military obligation if I arrived in the U.S. after only five years on the island. My siblings in the U.S. informed me that the law there allowed believers to serve the obligatory time in the U.S. military in some noncombatant duty. I had some reservations about

some American privileges and liberties, but I had to wait for clearer insight into their laws and practices until I got into such a position – if ever.

Now I thought it would be desirable for me to obtain some knowledge and experience in medical care: first aid, prevention and protection. I wondered how I could get a job in the prison hospital, or hospital lab. I thought it would be good for me to pray for our Lord's guidance, protection and correction in my prayers, desires, intentions and projects.

On the island there were two medical doctors as part of the highest-authority team. The two took turns -- one week on the island, one week at home (I think it was one week, but perhaps it was two). Because I had no personal need of medical help, I didn't know either one of them. Starting a medical file for each new prisoner was done by the prisoners, and only rare cases of health issues demanded a doctor's personal attention.

One day as I worked in my office as usual, I noticed an unfamiliar person sun-tanning on the terrace in front of the office. His entire appearance did not give the impression of a typical prison official. Some of the waiters – prisoners--knew him; he was one of the two doctors.

The day was hot, and I thought bringing him a glass of cold water might be a good first step toward introduction and generating some favorable attention. Kindness of a prisoner to an official could easily backfire, or at least be looked at with some doubt. I decided to try. As the man was stretched sun-tanning, I softly came to him and placed a glass of water with some ice-cubes close to his head. He was facing the opposite direction. I walked away just as softly. He did not move at all. From my office I watched to see what would happen. After some time, he turned his head toward the glass of water, and then he raised his head more and looked around. He could not see me in the office. He slowly reached for the glass and cautiously took a sip of water. The next moment, he drank up the water and continued tanning for a while. As soon as he was gone, I returned the empty glass to the dishwashing room. I repeated the same maneuver for a few days.

The first weekend after my "refreshments," the doctor came to the office to have his meal coupons stamped, that he could get refunded for the unused coupons. I took a risk again and asked him if he would be interested in giving me a job in the hospital. He looked at me narrowly and said slowly, "Are you the one...that gave

me cold water?" I smiled and didn't answer. He smiled, too, and continued, "I thought there must have been a reason..."

He told me to wait and see. He would probably be talking to the other doctor when they met each other later that day (typically the tanker would bring the other doctor, so the two doctors could have some time together for their mutual briefing and updates, before the tanker left). Not long after this conversation, I was transferred to work in the hospital as an apprentice in the laboratory.

I think the hospital was the most desirable workplace for prisoners. I was allowed to walk freely for the needs of my job, and to sleep in a semi-private bedroom. The prisoner I shared the bedroom with was just as much a dentist as I was going to become a lab-tech. He was a peaceful young man.

I think the hospital might have been used for officials and guards in the earlier years, because the location was on the peak of one of the hills with mild slopes. The buildings used for patients were simple. The front side was a walkway with doors – one for each room. The back side had all the windows. The restrooms were at the end of each building; some restrooms were still functional. There were no bathrooms. All the buildings were in poor shape in my days, but the crummy bedroom I shared with the "dentist" was much more comfortable than the dormitories in the camp. Never again did the bedbugs feed off of me. Our screened window faced the orchard. We never had a leaky roof. The floor was of terrazzo tiles.

Behind the buildings was an orchard of sweet cherries, sour cherries, almonds and some kind of plums. On a lower slope was a vineyard, planted in huge boxes built of large rocks on the slope. It must have looked beautiful before it was neglected. Although the orchard and the grapevines were not maintained – cultivated -- for years, for the alert prisoner that I was, there was plenty of fresh fruits - a long season. I was naturally on guard for food and food supplements.

The juicy stems of the tall blade grass were still a healthy supplement. Part of the job description for the lab-tech included handling the storage of special foods for patients with special diets. With the permission of the doctors, there was a more secured room for preserving some foods brought by the Christian visitors.

The creatures I remember observing on the island were rats, bats and some nocturnal birds at night. During daylight there were seagulls, doves, many sparrows, and many other small birds. Lizards were everywhere. Only once did I see a scorpion. It was on the ceiling of our bedroom – right above my face. I trust that was the reason why our Lord woke me up in the middle of the night. A simple broom took care of that scorpion, and I continued my peaceful sleep.

Only once I noticed a “poskok.” In the Croatian language that means “leaper” or “jumper.” It is a small but very venomous snake, a viper able to coil up and spring as high as its length, wrap around the victim’s arm and sting.

Prisoners working here and on another island nearby managed to bring cats as pets and to control mice.

Working and sleeping in the hospital was a luxury, by comparison to the camp and dormitories there. Whenever I had an opportunity to be free (to have some private time), one of many secluded private areas around the hospital were available for prayers, reading, gymnastic exercise and learning English. Every Son Day I walked to the camp and attended the meeting with the brothers. I found opportunities to do favors for the guards and for many prisoners, but especially for the doctors in order to gain more tolerance for my regular attendance of our Son Day meetings. I believe it worked for me. Our Lord took care of all my needs.

There was a lot of work in the lab. All the new prisoners in the quarantine were brought to the lab for screening to establish their files in the hospital. Some illnesses we checked for were syphilis, gonorrhea, worms, TBC and mental disorders. Arrival of quarantine prisoners helped me to learn face reading and guess who was a thief, a murderer, or a political or religious convict.

If among our quarantine patients I discovered a Christian, I had the joy of leading him to the private lab room to share our traditional salutation and to hear the news from back home. Another joy was relating to the brothers fresh Christian greetings, especially when one of them was a sibling. My special joy was to tell the newcomer, “We all hardly can wait for you to join us in our ‘church’.”

I talked to the managers, doctors, and even to the group referee when a Christian prisoner arrived. It was my prayer and hope that the new brothers would be given better, easier and healthier work and living conditions. Whenever one got a

preferred work place, my prayers of gratitude soared to the throne on high. My prison life was a long vacation with very frequent rejoicing and many revelations from our Lord, even though my night feasting on the Manna was less and less frequent.

MY TRANSGRESSION

My work in the lab demanded long hours on some days. Other days, there was a lot of time to learn English. Often, the busiest day was Saturday. On Friday, new prisoners were frequently brought to the island, with the same tanker that was bringing in and taking out the guards and the officials. The next day – Saturday-- the quarantine would bring the newcomers to the lab.

Down in the camp, most of the entertainment was available on Saturday: television, cinema, sports and some drama programs the prisoners were preparing to perform for the holidays. There was some hope of getting extra privileges, if their performance was recognized as good by the referees. Most of the prisoners working and living in the hospital preferred to visit the camp on Saturday.

It was an easy success for me to agree with the first lab-tech – he wanted to be free on Saturday and I desired to be free on Sunday to attend our meetings. Yes, there was often much work on Saturday, but I labored cheerfully having the hope of seeing my brothers the next day. Sometimes I was too cheerful for the prison rules.

One beautiful, sunny Saturday, all the hospital prisoners were gone to the camp entertainment and the hospital guard went with them. After all the new prisoners returned to the quarantine, I had some free time to finish all the lab work for the new files. I opened the big window wide, and enjoyed the fresh air. The silence was very pleasant; only the singing of small birds was heard from all sides.

For a while I was working silently. Then, I started humming some songs. Gradually, my voice grew louder and louder as the song was beautiful, the day was beautiful, the expectation of meeting my brothers was beautiful, and everything was just SO pleasant that I really had to express praise to the One that makes all things so beautiful.

For even more fresh air, I opened both doors wide--the main entry to the lab and the partition door separating the waiting room from the work room. I was working with the microscope and centrifugal machine, with my back toward the door and my face toward the instruments on the work counter.

Just for a few minutes, I allowed my heart to a loud crescendo. The thrill just took me up, and I do not know how long I sang or how loud it was. I noticed a shadow passing on my right hand side – between me and the large window. Since I noticed it too late, I felt that disrupting my singing at once would be an open acknowledgement of being wrong. I just ignored the shadow until I finished the stanza, with my voice gradually decreasing in volume to almost a hum.

Then I looked toward the window. No, it was not the hospital guard. It was the doctor; the same one that hired me in spite of strong opposition by the restaurant management. On his face there was no rebuke. He was smiling. I gladly returned the smile. Then he said, “Dejan, if I could believe as you do, I would be happier than being a doctor with all my income and all the privileges.” “Would you like to believe?” I asked. His smile disappeared. “It’s not as easy as you think,” he answered.

At that point, I was already way over the usual limits of a conversation between a prisoner and any official. Not to mention, one of the highest officials in the whole prison. He seemed a little moved. I was moved a lot. I think he realized that I loved him in a Christian way. I was very encouraged and so grateful for the privilege of touching the heart of a very sinful man. I was thankful for my visible joy in our Lord. It is a marvelous grace of our Blessed Savior to let the blind sinners see some of His graceful Face shining upon us.

A little later, the hospital prisoners returned from the camp tired, disappointed and grudgingly mumbling how soon they will get out of that Alcatraz and then they will have real entertainment -- not that rubbish they are limited to by the prison rules.

JUST ONE OF ALL GUARDS

All the prisoners were instructed and ordered to address their guards as “comrade commander.” A guard, whose last name was Korica, was a mild man, tall and strong. I never saw him intentionally mistreating a prisoner. Korica means

a small piece of bread-crust. I don't remember his first name; I probably never knew it. The officials, guards and prisoners all called him Korica.

Once I was walking among the trees that long ago might have been a part of a well-kept park. I was reading my small Book, holding my finger on the page John 1:1. If anyone would ask me what I was reading, that page was a very good start for a conversation. In the small Book, the chapter of Genesis 1:1 was not included.

Patrolling through the hospital, comrade commander Korica came to my spot and looked at me with a gentle question mark on his face. I turned to my page for opening a conversation, John 1:1. This is only a part of the entire Holy Scriptures, but it tells me so much about the reality of life and the world.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

"Comrade Commander, this is so real to me. I think the man-made theory of the universe coming into existence in any other way is so unreal and it contradicts many rules of the proven science." He did not argue with me. He listened to my faith with some acceptance. I do not remember how long we talked, before he continued his job patrolling. Before he left, he looked down to the ground under our feet and said, "Very likely in this ground are all the ingredients that are in our bodies, we are just ignorant of it all."

I was so thankful for his confession, although it was restrained and he never openly mentioned God. This was the last brief conversation with a servant from among the prisoners of the kind that was different than our prison.

AN ORGAN

One prisoner, an unbeliever, expected to be released soon. He had an accordion, and needed some food for the first few days outside. I had a small amount of money in my account in the camp canteen. We exchanged the items, and both of us were thankful. That experience induced some thinking -- will anyone have an open door for me when I arrive back to my native city? My family was in the U.S.A.

In a small ravine not very far from the hospital, a big pile of oak and pine lumber remnants were dumped--probably very long ago. I managed to select some pieces of the size I could use to make a small organ/keyboard to help me learn Christian songs better. In the wooden frame, I built in the accordion in a horizontal position. The keyboard I attached to the frame. The end with buttons I attached to the swing frame. Moving the swing forward and backward, I pumped the air and played the keys. I listened to the melody and followed with my voice. It worked.

In a few weeks, the prisoners and the guards were so used to my noise that nobody disturbed me. Most of them used some of my extra help or some favors. Some of them had an open account of personal needs. Also, a lab-tech that was always ready and willing to help, six days a week and almost twenty-four hours per day, was appreciated.

Just before my release, two new Nazarene prisoners arrived and both were reserved for the hospital work. There was no question to whom the organ should be given. My bedroom continued as a "no smoking" bedroom after my departure. I hope the two new prisoners enjoyed the fruits and grapes that I told them about.

HYSTERIA

Our meetings continued regularly without disturbance from the guards or the other prisoners. Very rarely a guard or an officer would be mean to us, and tried to interrupt or prevent our singing and Book reading. Almost always the mean ones would not last long in that position. How our Lord took care of us was not known to us. All we noticed was, such a one disappeared after his first intrusion.

One Son-Day afternoon, we were together in our rocky chapel. It was singing time. One younger prisoner came and sat on a rock fairly nearby, and started pretending to sing some worldly songs. To me, his singing looked just like intentional interference. He was not a singer at all, just noisy. When we were not singing, he was silent also. When we continued singing, he continued his noise. After a short time, we moved to another "chapel." He followed us. We moved to the old unfinished hall, and spent the rest of our time together just walking and talking.

The next day, Monday evening, a group of six prisoners came to the hospital with a stretcher. On the stretcher was our intruder. He seemed to be under an attack of hysteria. He was shaking with grave tension in all visible muscles. His eyes were forcefully closed as if someone threw hot pepper in his face. It was my job to lead them with their load to a room where the caged beds were. I locked him in a cage-bed, and after making the room as dark as possible, I returned to my work.

That day we had an x-ray-tech doing her annual checkup of all the prisoners. I think it was another international requirement the Yugoslav government submitted to, in order to qualify for Most Preferred Nation and low interest loans. Because the tech was a woman, for her safety there had to be a Christian prisoner present to help her. Prisoners in the waiting room were escorted in one at a time, and returned by the Christian prisoner.

When the last prisoner passed through the x-ray checkup, I checked the time and saw that it was almost two hours after the hysteric patient had arrived. I asked the lady tech if she could help with the problem. We walked to the room where I left him locked up. I turned the light on. He was still shaking with the same tension as before.

I opened the cage. She sat on the bed next to the shaking man. She moved his eye lids slightly open. He did not show any change. She stood up, bent over him and slapped him strongly across his face. He stopped shaking for a moment and then continued with a little more force. She repeated the same "therapy" from the other side. Instantly he relaxed – no more shaking! I left him in the cage, locked in the semi-dark room.

I just followed her instructions--I had no knowledge about hysteria. Her last instructions were to unlock him in about half to one hour for recovering. After that, she thanked me for assisting and I think a vehicle from outside took her to the hotel close to the harbor. The patient was behaving soberly before supper. The doctor ordered him kept in the hospital until the next day. I was ordered to take the patient's blood and urine for the routine lab tests before breakfast, and to bring the results to the doctor.

From the other prisoners, I learned what events happened to cause my patient's hysteria. He was a young man about twenty years old at the time we met him. He

was the only son of a young single mother. I did not ask him if she was divorced or never married. He lived without purpose and direction in his life.

As I talked to him early that morning, it was clear that people without purpose and direction do have a purpose imposed on them by the Adversary. They are victims of seeking pleasure in victimizing other souls. Their imposed direction is loss after loss, and their ending is loss forever.

The day before he was brought to the hospital, he had a wrestling match with another prisoner. The other wrestler was stronger. My patient just could not accept defeat, so he escaped into a hysteria attack. Six other prisoners brought him on the stretcher to the hospital.

Early the next morning, he was sent to the lab. He was well-built, he had no venereal disease symptoms, and his face was not deformed with maliciousness. He looked empty, and with a slightly childish desire to be loved, accepted, and favored. This was a common mental condition of many younger prisoners.

I invited him in, pointed to the chair and said, "Sit here, please, and lay your left arm on the small glass table." I tightened the rubber band above his elbow. I cleaned his skin with alcohol at the spot for inserting the needle to draw some blood. I was working very slowly. With the syringe and needle in my hand I stopped for a moment and looked narrowly in his face, "Are you the one...that was singing so close to my group...?" Before I completed my question, he nodded to confirm without words.

"Why did you do that?" I asked. He was silent. I did not wish him to jump into another attack of hysteria. I was a little older than he and I was in a white lab coat, but that usually did not appear to scare my patients. I talked calmly. I presented to him this side of reasoning: it is better to make friends in a peaceful manner, than to risk some reaction you cannot control. We talked a little longer and parted as friends, or at least friendly acquaintances. Never again did he try to pester us nor get in the way of our meeting.

Later, I considered the whole case about this man. I can be thankful for the opportunity and the outcome. But I can only be ashamed of myself. In my desire to have a safe and pleasant time with my Christian brothers, I was selfish and narrow-minded. Why did I limit the grace of our Savior? Why did I not at least try

to touch his heart with some words from the Gospel perspective? Why did I not think that this soul needs our Savior's call? Perhaps I did – I do not remember now. But shame on me anyway, I did not do it.

I knew that he could report me and cause me to be removed from the job envied by many prisoners. Yes, I knew reaching to the other prisoners with Christian love could even add to my prison time. Was all of that sufficient reason not to follow our Lord? I did not deny Him openly, but I did not follow Him to suffer with Him. Was I not called to follow, or was I deaf to His call? Why? WHY? Perhaps this young man would not listen...I can place many possibilities under "perhaps." But one important fact is not "perhaps"- it is sure - I failed again. O, Lord, have mercy upon me – a sinner.

FAREWELL, DEAR BROTHERS

My remaining days in prison were blessed by our Savior's presence, guidance, protection and correction. In the best of His accomplishments in and through me, I was far from the disciples whose simple, faithful and marvelous examples radiated Christ's love and grace in them and through them throughout their ministry. Yes, I failed, but our Blessed Redeemer never did. He never left me alone. The wonder of wonders is that He wants to reward **me** for all that **HE** has done.

My last Son-Day we did not talk much, we just observed. Then we looked down at the rocks, not really seeing them. We were sadly thoughtful-- sharing the suffering of breaking apart the bond of belonging to this small Church among the Cliffs, where we grew in grace and knowledge of the Son of God, our blessed Lord, our Sustainer. We read a few more lines from the Book: *Numbers 6:24 The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: 25 The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: 26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*

Then a song, just the reading – no singing: *God be with you till we meet again; 'Neath His wings protecting hide you, Daily manna still provide you; God be with you till we meet again. Till we meet, till we meet, till we meet at Jesus' feet; God be with you till we meet again.*

I went down to the dormitory that wouldn't be mine any longer. I picked up the chest and gave it to a Christian brother with my explanation about the secret/sacred library. All the brothers shared a hearty hug, a charity kiss and our last farewell greeting words in the Name of our All in All. I walked to the camp gate, reported my leaving for the quarantine, and the guard motioned his hand to let me pass. I turned back and waved my final farewell to the small group standing on a cliff behind the dormitories. They returned their farewell, and I walked off to the quarantine.

It was a different room – not the same one I entered a little less than five years ago. I learned that my letter which I wrote a month ago to my relatives in Novi Sad reached the addressee in good order and their response was prompt. The civil garments I left in our family residence five years ago arrived to the quarantine two days before my release. I think the quarantine-exit department officials had the garments ironed and kept clean for my departure. I took off my prison uniform for the last time. I felt funny in the civil garb.

Later that afternoon, with a guard and a few other prisoners in civil clothing, I walked to the harbor and boarded the Izvor – the black tanker. Slowly the tanker glided out of the small harbor to the open sea and turned about a hundred degrees. The engines accelerated, and the ship took direction toward Rijeka.

I briskly hastened to the back end of the tanker and waved to my brothers hidden in the bushes, while praying for the everlasting Unity in our Lord's Spirit (prisoners' communication with the people on the ship was forbidden). A few times before, I had been there with them, praying for the other departing brothers. This time I was the departing one. It was a sunny day with a gentle breeze. In about two hours, the sunset marked the end of my last day on GoliOtok. The five-year-long Son Day of the cup of blessings; a treasure of blessed memories, a Son Day bright with the mercy and grace of the Crucified, Risen and Glorified Lamb of God - the King of kings. It was five years of my weaknesses, shortcomings, mistakes, blemishes – many imperfections on my walk. I failed, but HE kept HIS Promises, HE washed my feet...HE is Victorious forever.

As the island was shrinking in the growing distance, my heart experienced an unfamiliar anguish. No tears; just grief – sharp and deep; beyond expression in words.

The sunset glow and evening mist made the island fade away.

Now was the time for a prayerful look forward.

Lord, the next steps, moments, or months, years, or perhaps decades, all are in Thy eternal power, in Thy amazing grace. I praise Thee O Father for Thy guidance, protection and correction. Keep us in Thy grace. Take Thy redeemed souls from death to Life Everlasting; carry us in Thy loving care from dust to glory, from ignorance to Thy Revelation, from our self to Christ in us and we in Him, for that is Thy pleasure. Blessed is Thy Name forever. Thy Will be done, as in Heaven – so in earth.

NEEDLESS ADDITION

As I was writing “A Cup of Blessings,” one voice told me a number of times: such honest writing is useless because many will not believe it. Yet, I continued and finished, because I know Him Who knows the whole truth much better than I can write it down; this is more than sufficient to me.