

MARCH 2024

Baptist COURIERS FOR CHRIST

SCRIPTURES ARRIVE *in Croatia!*

We were delighted to receive word that not one, but TWO containers have arrived in Croatia that Couriers (through the sacrificial giving of partner churches) was able to send. The first container arrived bearing over 25,000 whole Bibles produced by the Bible and Literature Missionary Foundation ministry in Shelbyville, Tennessee. The second container containing over 400,000 Croatian John & Romans arrived a couple of days later. These gospel booklets were assembled by a network of churches connected with the BPS Seedline ministry. It is such a blessing to partner with these ministries to get the word of God produced, shipped around the world, and ultimately placed into the hands of those who don't have it. These containers of scripture have been off loaded into a warehouse hub and in subsequent weeks will be sent to various missionaries and ministries across Croatia to be given to the nationals. We are taking a team of Americans in late April to Split, Croatia, to distribute as many of the John & Romans as the people of that city will receive over a two-week period. We are privileged to work with veteran missionary Johnny Leslie during this outreach. We covet your prayers as the seed continues to be sown.

Acts 12:24 **"But the word of God grew and multiplied."**

Please visit couriersforchrist.com for more information about the Together 4 Split campaign.



HISTORY

Highlight

The Covert Handoff

by Donald Stertz

The instructions were clear: “Go into the marketplace across the street from the hotel at the busiest part of the day; take a left at the sidewalk; and move at a steady pace with your eyes forward. When you feel a tug on the bag, don’t look around and don’t fight the person pulling at the handle. Let go of it and continue walking without the bag as though it just disappeared.”

No, this wasn’t a scene from a spy movie, but an actual event that happened to me during the Cold War era near the beginning of the Couriers for Christ ministry. If we forget the past and how God has guided, protected, and supplied, then our faith will be weakened for future acts that he wants to do in and through us. We serve the same God today that protected Daniel in the lions den, preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, and brought the children of Israel safely out of Egypt. Also, if we forget how things once were, it may cause us to be unappreciative of those blessings that we now enjoy. I often reflect on this while working on a Couriers scripture distribution campaign. During the first ten years of our ministry it would have been impossible to do what we do freely today! So, in your mind’s eye, take a journey with me back to the spring of 1978 into the communist country of Romania.

Bucharest, Romania, was home to about two million people at the time, and they were suffering under the iron fist of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. My friend from our home church, Dick Ives, traveled with me because Laura stayed home with our firstborn son, who was only a few months old at the time. Also, Dick had an interest in these countries, and he is bilingual (whereas most people behind the Iron Curtain couldn’t speak English). It is impossible to describe to you the feeling of oppression that we, as Americans, felt as we entered into those countries that lacked not only

the freedom that we enjoy but also the spiritual moorings. Everything in that country was dingy and unkempt, and the gaunt faces of folks that we passed on the streets looked almost lifeless. As Dick and I walked into the hotel Bucharest, we could feel questioning eyes on us. We had brought with us a suitcase for a pastor in the area that contained clothing, medicine, finances, and scriptures. It was nearly impossible to get accurate addresses sent out to us in the free world without compromising the Christians on the inside because all mail was opened and scanned. What we did have was a surname, a district of the city, and a street name. In today’s world of GPS, it would be relatively easy to find; but back then, it was like finding a needle in a haystack. After we checked into our room, we came downstairs and asked the stone-faced, ornery desk clerk for a phone book. She stared us down for a moment and then with an expressionless face pulled a large phone book out from under the desk. The huge book landed with a thud on the counter as she continued her icy glare. I felt like her eyes were trying to bore a hole into our skulls



People packed so tightly on the public transportation that the bus doors couldn’t close, a common sight behind the Iron Curtain. Note the government building in the background with Ceausescu’s picture looming large!



Don Stertz with son Joshua around the time of this first trip into Romania

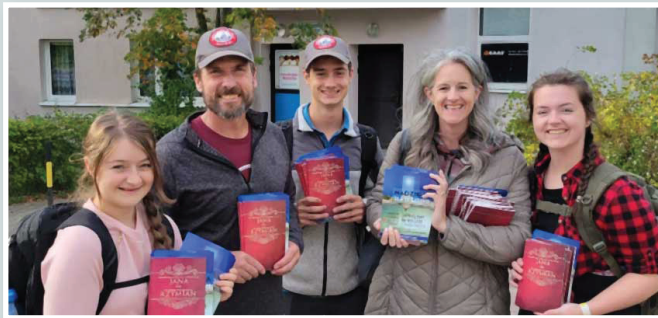
Dick Ives preparing luggage for trip behind the Iron Curtain.

and read our very thoughts. I grabbed the book, thinking to take it across the room where we could have some privacy to find the pastor's name, but as I tried to pull it off the counter I heard the distinctive sound of the chain rattling that was holding it to the desk. At that moment, the book was nearly jerked free of my fingertips, and the desk clerk sneered with some satisfaction. Privacy was something that Eastern Europeans in the Cold War knew very little of, and we were quickly being educated. We thumbed through the pages of the book only to find the last name of the pastor along with about five hundred others of the same name. There was no way that we were willing to further compromise this pastor under the watchful eye of the desk clerk. I would find out years later that all desk staff at international hotels were KGB agents!

What to do now? We couldn't give up; we had to find this man so that we could deliver these much needed supplies. It wasn't long until we had the thought of calling a taxi. Who would better know the city than a taxi cab driver? Whatever standard you have in your mind of a taxi--this wasn't it! Dick and I wondered if this machine was even road worthy--let alone safe--but we didn't have much of a choice, so we climbed in cautiously and handed the district/street name to the driver. He stared blankly at the paper for a moment and then climbed out of the cab to make a call. Before we knew it, we were off into the suburbs. The further that we retreated from the tall, poorly constructed highrise apartments in the city center, the more it felt like the slums. The road conditions got worse, and every once in a while it was obvious that our driver didn't know where he was going. Dick and I did the only thing that we could do--pray! We earnestly asked God to direct us to this family, believing that he would. After a couple more phone calls to headquarters for further directions, our driver stopped on a street that would've been better traversed with an off-road Jeep than a taxi cab! The little houses that lined the roadway were surrounded by fences, and the street seemed to stretch on for a mile. We had no house number--what now? We asked our driver if this was the place and he just motioned down the street while nodding yes. As we walked down the street we began to fervently pray that God would direct us to the exact house...

Next month we will continue this history highlight.

A Josh Stertz Family Update!



The Lord has blessed our family in the last 18 months. Josh and I are busy with the work of the ministry. While we travel, it is always a joy to share our mission: to assist church planting through scripture distribution. We also love to share the message that the word of God is too important to take for granted, and that we all have the opportunity to sow the seed wherever we go. In between trips Josh has spoken for chapel services at the Christian school, brought the ministry tech items up to date, booked more future meetings, and worked on some home repairs. I occasionally fill in at the hospital and have taken some counseling classes online.

The kids are growing up fast, and we are enjoying every minute we have with them. Throughout last year we have been traveling mostly as a family of four. Zachariah is in 5th grade. He enjoys playing basketball and taking on restoration projects. He restored a 1970 Wheel Horse garden tractor with Josh last year and is beginning another tractor this spring. Zach loves it when he gets to help a pastor or church member with a project when we are on the road. Judge is in 7th grade and played both tackle football (much to mom's chagrin) and basketball this school year. He has started playing the piano and is making good progress. He is very excited about turning 14 this year and being old enough to go on a Couriers Campaign overseas with us. Claudia is a high school senior and will graduate in May. This year in school she has participated in theater and choir. Recently she started teaching Sunday school at our home church (Wyldeewood Baptist Church) and working the sound booth during church services. She has worked part-time as a CNA since last summer and is praying about her options for college in the fall. Although she misses traveling with the



Continued on back page...

family, staying home has given her opportunities to experience a “normal” senior year. Caleb is 19, working as a carpenter’s apprentice at a local custom cabinetry shop, taking classes at our Bible institute, and teaching junior church. He has surrendered to full- time Christian service and will be taking a two-month mission trip to Croatia this spring. Please pray with us for God to direct his steps.

While the kids are growing up, the miles keep ticking by too. Over the past year we have been in churches in Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Indiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, North Carolina, Virginia, North Dakota, and Minnesota. Our faithful ministry van Gulliver turns 20 this year and has over 205,000 miles. We are grateful for those who have invested time and resources this past year into Gulliver’s maintenance and repairs to help us fulfill God’s command. Along those many highway miles we have met or re-connected with so many wonderful friends from churches all over this country.

We saw God answer prayers during the two Couriers for Christ Campaigns in 2023--one to the South Tyrol region of northern Italy in June and the other to Olsztyn, Poland, in October. Caleb and Claudia were able to join us on both campaigns, and we had a wonderful time working alongside our children. Even better, our kids got to minister with their grandparents. God is so good to let us minister on the mission field with both Josh’s parents and our children. Thank you for your prayers, acts of kindness, and faithful support over the past year. We couldn’t do what God has called us to do without your partnership.

II Corinthians 1:11 “Ye also helping together by prayer for us...”



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Please scan the code at left
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