

Baptist COURIERS FOR CHRIST

April 2024

By Many or By Few

by Joshua Stertz

"Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" stated President Ronald Reagan June 12, 1987. It seemed like an impossibility at the time, but within a couple of short years the hold that communism had on those Iron Curtain countries would be released. When freedom was realized in 1990, Couriers for Christ had the privilege to bask in the sunlight of new opportunities. Don Stertz was approached by a gentleman who asked if he would be interested in shipping a container filled with Chick Tracts to Romania. It seemed like a huge expense and uncertainty to deliver a 20' shipping container (roughly half the size of a semi-trailer) considering the fact that most of our previous shipping had been done through M-bags. However, after prayer and a confirming peace from the Lord, the Couriers team gave the go-ahead for that first of what would be many containers to follow. John 4:35, **"...Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."** I love to think how the Lord has supplied the financial needs to send well over a hundred containers loaded with scriptures, discipleship materials, hymnals, tracts, etc., in the past three decades! Thank you, partner churches, for your sacrificial giving so that we can be used to fulfill the literature needs of individuals and churches across Europe and beyond. This month we are shipping a container

(number 123) of tracts for Chick Publications to the Philippines. Please pray that the more than 2.6 million tracts in six different dialects (plus English) would arrive safely to the islands of the Philippines where they can be used as evangelistic tools to share the gospel message with millions of lost folks. We have heard many stories of souls coming to know the forgiveness of their sins and experiencing the love of Jesus Christ after receiving a gospel tract. As you pray for this container to make it safely and those tracts to be distributed, please stop by your church tract rack, stock up, and pass some out in your community today. Only the salvation of Jesus Christ can break down the walls of sin and hopelessness that so many people are experiencing across this world. John 8:36, **"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."**



Some examples of Chick Tracts that we have distributed over the years



HISTORY

Highlight

The Covert Handoff - Part Two

as told by Donald Stertz

The story that follows is an actual event that happened to me during the Cold War era near the beginning of the Couriers for Christ ministry. In your mind's eye, take a journey with me back to the spring of 1978 into the communist country of Romania as we continue our story from last month.

Dick Ives and I were in Bucharest, Romania, trying to make contact with a pastor and his family. We had some scriptures, booklets, and medical aid for them but didn't have an adequate address. The Lord had given us the insight to call a cab in hopes that the taxi driver could find the address. After a period of time and several calls to headquarters, he let us out at the end of a street lined with houses. Having no idea if we were even in the right neighborhood, let alone the correct street, we picked a house with a tall fence and walked up to it. I glanced nervously at Dick as I began to softly knock on the gate. It seemed like an eternity before a young girl with a questioning expression appeared at the front door of the house. I could see her face through the spaces in between the fence boards. As she walked up close to us, her face broke into a sweet smile. The Lord had miraculously directed us not only to the correct neighborhood and street but also to the exact house that we needed to visit in a city of several million people! Psalm 31:3, **"For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me."**

The girl quickly opened the makeshift gate and led us into the tiny house. Although we could tell that they tried their best to keep a clean house, it seemed like an exercise in



futility given the dirt floor. The girl didn't appear to speak or understand very much English, but she motioned for us to sit on a pile of mats that were propped up precariously against the wall. While we waited, the ladies of the house brought us some hot tea and bread to eat. Mind you, Romanians at that time were starving, yet they were concerned with being hospitable to their guests. This is something that I would witness many dozens of times over the upcoming years throughout the Iron Curtain countries. Soon, the older brother made it home from work, and he spoke English quite well. It was then that we learned that 12 PEOPLE lived in that small two-bedroom

"...Don't look around and don't fight the person pulling at the handle."

house! The "family room" that we were currently in also served as sleeping quarters. The mats that we had been sitting on were taken down and spread throughout the room at night so that each member would have a place to sleep. The other room was a kitchen as we had expected, but it also doubled as a place to take sponge baths when it was time to clean up. Winter or summer, the toilet was an outhouse in the backyard! This was indeed an eye-opening experience for those living with American amenities in the late 1970s.

It was at this point in the conversation that I casually mentioned that I had brought some items in for the family from the west. Something in his change of expression made me instantly uneasy as he asked, "Where are they?"

"Back at the hotel in my room," I replied, feeling like we had made a mistake in not bringing them along tonight. My suspicions were confirmed with his next statement.

"This is going to be a problem! It will be very difficult bringing items out of the hotel without raising the suspicion of the KGB!" As I was starting to ask him what we should do, he was already springing into action. He left the room and a few moments later returned with a large carpet bag (duffel) and told me to make sure that I billowed it open before getting out of the taxicab at the hotel. He further instructed me to carry it into the hotel with a perceived effort of the amount of weight that it would have in it the following morning. As if he hadn't been solemn enough already, he looked me straight in the eye and flatly stated, "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.”

When we arrived back at the hotel that night, we did exactly as we were told. In the morning I felt the knot tightening in my stomach as we got closer to the transfer time. Around 10:30 a.m. the foot traffic seemed to have really picked up across the street. We said a quick prayer for safety, and I grabbed the bag and carried it back through the lobby in the same fashion that I had brought it in the night before. The desk clerk’s eyes were boring a hole through me as I tried to walk nonchalantly across the open room, knowing that the contraband I had in the bag could get me in big trouble!

As we stepped into the sea of humanity on the opposite side of the street and made a left turn, I wondered how the young man would ever find me. It was hard to walk through the crowd without occasionally bumping into someone, but within a few minutes, I felt it! There was a sharp tug on the bag, which was in my right hand, I looked questioningly to Dick, who was walking on my left. As he looked back at me, his expression seemed to indicate that we were good, and I released the handle and kept walking, eyes forward.

A short distance ahead, I spied a clothing store and motioned to Dick that we should step inside. As my eyes adjusted to the dim light in the store, I noticed that it was nearly half empty. That was a common sight in Eastern Europe under the rule of Communism. All eyes in the shop were suddenly on the strangers and so we pretended to be interested in purchasing a hat. It was at that moment that we saw him, a man dressed like a secret agent out of a 1930s gangster film, and when I locked eyes with him, he immediately averted his stare. Not surprisingly, when we left the store, so did he. We took our time heading back to the hotel but noticed that the man in the fedora was always within sight. I was beginning to comprehend what it felt like to be in the discriminating eye of a dictatorial regime. Later that week we were reunited with the young man at his midweek church service. He thanked us for the provisions and scripture in the bag, and then he solemnly stated, “Many, many eyes are upon you!”

All these years later, I am still so thankful to serve a God that is all powerful and able to protect his servants as we share his word with the world. Luke 1:79 states, **“To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”** As we have obeyed his call to give the light of the gospel to those who sit in darkness, he has been that perfect guide in the way of peace--no matter how seemingly impossible the circumstances.



To give light...

Small Things?

by Kelli Stertz

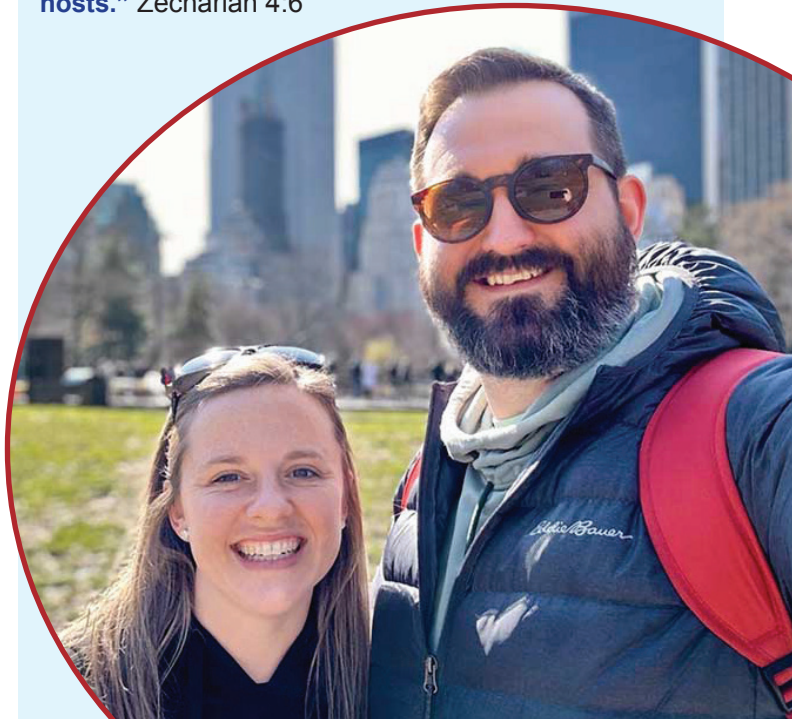
“For who hath despised the day of small things?”

God asks this rhetorical question while explaining to Zechariah (4:10) that Zerubbabel will finish the temple for which he had earlier laid the cornerstone. The project may be opposed and delayed, but the Lord declared that it would be finished at last with his own hands. Scoffers thought that the minimal progress would never amount to anything. When the temple is completed, though, the joy of celebration will silence any who observed the slow, small beginning with doubt.

A few months ago we met a couple from Arkansas at a conference. Doug and Amy Francis are on staff at their church and have a heart to share Jesus with the lost. When Amy saw our display, she noticed a John and Romans booklet in Italian and asked if we could get one for her. Fifteen years ago she had been a nanny for a family in Italy, and she now had a burden to share the gospel with them. We were able to hand her the book right off the table, which she promptly shipped over to them. Here is the response she received:

“Dear Amy, We received Giovanni e Romani. Thank you very much to you and Doug. Marina and I were touched by your gift and will read it thoroughly together. We hope we can meet soon again. -Marina and Marco” Please pray for the Bolgiani family. This may be the first time they have ever heard the gospel. They also have 21 year old twins that desperately need Jesus. Amy and Doug were able to make a difference because of a few small things: a small request, a small book, and a small amount of postage. Just like the basket of five loaves and two fishes, the small things we do for the sake of the gospel can accomplish the Lord’s plan in the lives of others.

In God’s work the day of small things is not to be despised. God chooses to use us as weak and unskilled laborers to bring about great things. **“...Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”** Zechariah 4:6



Coming Soon!

Together 4 Split Campaign

Split, Croatia
April 29-May 11, 2024

This campaign will assist a church plant that is currently underway in that city and region. It is tourist city located in the southern portion of Croatia, right on the Adriatic Sea. Please pray for safety in travel and health for our team members, and most of all that souls will come to know Christ!



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