

A Heart for God, Establishing the Kingdom of God in Unlikely Circumstances.



Perhaps Natalia Chesnova, (Natasha or Chessie) was born for a mission from God. It could appear so. Chessie was born in the nether regions of Chukota, Russia in 1980. Her home town of Pevek is 220 miles north of the Arctic Circle and north of the infamous Magadan and Kolyma gulag gold mines from which almost no one survived. If in the port city of Pevek, you were probably descended from zeks (prisoners) or the camp guards. Natalia's grandmother came to this treeless northern plain to be with her husband who was in the gulag at Magadan. She braved cold, 40 to 50 degrees below zero, and crowded trains and ships with her young daughter, Natalia's mother, in tow while pregnant with Natalia's aunt. After surviving the gulag the family settled in the area - not uncommon as there was often no where to go and no jobs for former zeks. The years passed. When Stalin died in 1953 and a lot of the camps were emptied out Natalia's mother and aunt traveled

to Moscow where they made sure to visit the Red Square mausoleum just to make sure Lenin, and especially Stalin were really dead. Her father worked as an engineer and mother became a teacher in Pevek until 1997 when they moved back to Ukraine and settled in the Donbas region. Natalia attended the High Business School in Economics and then worked for Apple as a journalist for technology, writing articles and translating technological papers and brochures.

In March, 2014, Russians and separatist proxies invaded the Donbas amid confusion after the corrupt president, Yanukovich, fled the country. Natalia was torn about leaving her home but was convinced when her 7 year old daughter was told at gunpoint by a 5 year old with a Soviet WW2 era submachine gun "give me your swing, it's mine now." Fighting was erupting throughout the oblast as Ukrainians tried to wrest seized towns from the insurgents. Natalia tearfully recounts how she put her daughter on a bus with other children to be evacuated to Odesa, not knowing when or if she would see her again. The next day, her father was able to secure a ticket for her on the train to Odesa during a supposed cease fire. It was the last train to leave. As shells burst around the train terrified passengers pressed mattresses against the windows to try to protect from shattering glass. Eventually they cleared the war zone and proceeded to Odesa.

Reaching Odesa, Chesnova was able to reunite with her daughter and seek shelter in an old sanatorium along with 115 children she had gathered around her along the way. She began to work feverishly writing, translating, doing all possible to provide food, even just bread, for "her children". As summer wore on they were told they had to leave and Natalia called all over Ukraine trying to find a place to move to but all were full or refused. Seemingly at the end of despair, she was given the number to Father's House and connection to president Roman Korniiiko:

"We are in Odesa but have to move."

"You can come here."

"But there are 115 children."

"We will make room."

"But we are in Odesa and have no bus."

"We will find a bus!"

The next day all 115 children crowded onto the bus and started the journey to Father's House. Once there they were warmly welcomed with food, clothing, shelter. and love. They were enrolled in school. Natalia now took on the task of reuniting each child with a family. In a year she reunited every child, all 115, with a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle in a family relationship. As she learned at her grandmother's knee long ago: families are important.

Natalia stayed on at Father's House and now helps arrange and prepare children for adoptions along with other tasks. Father's House is unique in handling all the paperwork of adoption on the Ukrainian side without charge. They refuse donations from adoptive parents but simply ask them to provide a loving Christian home to the child. Summer hosting programs in the US often charge \$3000 or more per child. Father's House, again, handles all details on the Ukrainian side - hosting families pay only for the air fare, submit a police report, and provide medical coverage - \$1500 or less.

Surely Natalia Chesnova and Roman Korniiiko and the rest of the staff at Father's House are step-by-step, day-by-day, pushing back against the world to establish God's Kingdom here on earth, even under the most unlikely circumstances.