

BIG FAMILY

Mission to Children

June 2006

“Worship that is pure and unblemished in the sight of God the father is this: to visit and help and care for the widows and orphans in their affliction and need....” James 1:27 (AMP)



This is one of the photos of children that Eva and Misha took at Luga when they visited there to congratulate the graduates. Not all of these children are graduating. Can you guess which ones? The graduates are: Back row: Tania, 3rd from left; Gena, 5th from left, and Alexey, far right. Front row: Elena, second from left, and Natasha, far right.



Eva and Misha, with the orphan graduates at Kommunar, left to right: Eva, Olga, Marina, Natasha, Ruslan, and Misha.

Graduation and the final bell for orphans

It was a beautiful, sunny afternoon in Luga, Russia, and we and the children enjoyed the opportunity to go outside to play games and have a good time together. Several of us were sitting on a bench, watching the others play, and through our interpreter Eva, I turned and asked the children sitting nearby: “Are any of you graduating this year?” Tania answered “yes”. So then I asked: “What will you do when you graduate?” Her answer: “I don’t know.” Next I asked, “Where will you be going?” Her answer: “I don’t know.”

We wish that we could tell you that Tania’s situation is rare in Russia, but unfortunately it is the norm for children who graduate from the orphanages at age 15 and 16.

Graduation time at a Russian orphanage is a time of “happy sadness”. The graduates are happy that they

have completed their basic education program, but they are sad because they will now leave the only home and family they have ever known and journey into the future that holds few plans and no real dreams. The Russians call the last day of school “the final bell”, and unfortunately, for many of our orphans, the “finality” of the final bell rings loud and strong.

On paper and in government regulations, it would appear that the children are given a future: they can continue their education and get a job. The real situation: the girls will be sent off to school to learn to be pastry chefs or hairdressers, and the boys will be sent off to school to become auto mechanics. Most of them will remain in these vocational schools for only a few months. Why? Because suddenly, they are on their own and must take responsibility for getting up, getting on a train, going to school, completing homework, and taking care of life’s everyday requirements. What do the kids do when they drop out of vocational school? They hang out with friends, drink, perhaps experiment with drugs, and live each day not knowing what the next will bring. Tragic? Yes... only lots of prayer and lots of love can save the orphan children of Russia.

This year for the first time, our Russian coordinators (Eva and Misha) visited Kommunar and Luga internats to congratulate the orphan children who are graduating from the schools there. We wanted the children to know that we will still be there for them after they graduate. We encouraged the children to write us or call Eva and Misha to stay in touch. Our prayers for these graduates is vital. We will attempt to stay in touch with them and to help them however we can as they struggle with making it on their own.

From the graduating class of 2006, Tania is the child whose smile and eyes reflect a hope for the future. Tania has been rescued by the Big Family foster home in Kommunar. Please pray for more foster homes and more rescues in the future of Big Family!

Anna’s story is typical

Eva and Misha were delighted that Anna showed up for the “final bell” ceremonies at Kommunar. Anna is a 2005 graduate from the Kommunar internat, and unfortunately, her story is the typical story for an orphanage graduate. She graduated at age 16, and was assigned to go to school in St. Petersburg to learn how to become a hair dresser. Through Eva and Misha, Big Family continued to keep in contact with Anna and encourage her in her studies. When she needed special equipment for her schooling, Big Family provided the



equipment. Unfortunately, without the everyday mentoring and encouragement and discipline that comes



Anna with Eva

from parents, Anna began to skip classes and eventually dropped out of school in St. Petersburg. The good news about Anna's story is that she does know that she has friends in America and in Russia who love her and pray for her. She came to visit with us when we were in Russia in May, and then

came by to see Eva and Misha at the "final bell" ceremony later in May. What is Anna doing these days? Living with a girl friend, and working as a waitress at a bar. Please pray for Anna and her future. Anna has heard the word of God, and His word does not return void!

More about May trip to Russia

In last month's newsletter, we began a chronological narrative about our May trip to Russia. This month, we continue, and pick up with Monday, 1 May, which is the May Day holiday in Russia.

We had planned Monday to have special time with our foster family in Kommunar, and it was indeed a blessed day: talking with the children, visiting with Ira and Max, playing with little Vania, enjoying lunch cooked by Ira with help from the children, surprised with a special treat baked by Misha: absolutely delicious pizza! We now have three official children at the foster home: Tania and Ulia (sisters) and Vania, who graduated from the Kommunar orphanage last year. Vania's sister Slaviana is not officially a foster child, but she spends much time with the family and was there all day to visit with us on this special occasion. We are praying that all of the paperwork can soon be official, and that Slaviana will become our fourth child at the foster home.

Tuesday was a day for visiting with some of our Christian friends in St. Petersburg: Natasha Billie, who is director of a Finnish charitable organization that has been helping with projects in Kommunar and Luga; Ira and Zenia, the husband and wife team who are our ministry volunteers at St. Petersburg Orphanage No. 14, and Mike and Olga Cantrell, from MIR, our official covering organization for charitable work in Russia.

We reserved Wednesday, our last day for this journey in Russia, for the children at Kommunar. Because the school is being closed, we knew that we would be with them at their "home" for the last time. Pastor Ura was our driver for the day, and helped us buy frozen pizza and coke for the children on our way to Kommunar. It was "movie time" in Kommunar, and using pastor Ura's video projector, we were able to treat the Kommunar children to a special time of good food and fellowship.

As always, the "goodbyes" were extremely difficult. We promised the children that wherever they go, we will find them. We will not forget them. We will continue to love and pray for them, and we will see them again in the fall of 2006.

Prayer requests

- Please pray that God will open doors to allow some of the children at Luga and Kommunar to come to America for Christmas 2006. Initial response from the Education Committee that will either approve or deny the program is that they frown on such programs. Please pray that God will soften the hearts of those who will make the decision, and some of our lovely children will have the opportunity of a lifetime to spend four weeks in the U.S. this Christmas.
- Please continue to pray for families for all the orphan children of Russia and the world.
- Please pray for all of our Family Friends in the U.S. and for all of our volunteer ministers in Russia.
- Please pray that more churches will be open to hearing about the needs of orphans and how they can get involved.

Is all of your work being blessed?

God commands in Deuteronomy 24:19-22 that we are to leave part of our "harvest" for widows, orphans, and strangers. Attached to the command is a God-sized promise: He will bless you in all of your work!

Dear Family Friends who are faithfully providing part of your harvest to help the orphans of Russia, this promise is for you! Be blessed in all of your work!

Read and meditate on this scripture. We would love to hear testimonies of how God is blessing you in all of your work! Send us an e-mail or a letter to let us know how God is blessing you!

What's happening at Orphanage No. 14?

You may have noticed that we did not visit Orphanage No. 14 during our last trip to Russia. Based on our previous visits to No. 14, it is apparent that the children there often have visitors from the U.S., Finland, and Sweden. The children see many foreigners coming and going, but they are not able to build long-term friendships with any of them. Our volunteer team at No. 14 goes into the orphanage every week, and they have been able to establish the kind of long-term friendships that the children really need. Some of the children have started to go to church as the result of this regular ministry. We continue to work in No. 14 through our faithful volunteers.

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