



## A CHRISTMAS STORY

DECEMBER 1989— 20 YEARS AGO:  
THE FALL OF EASTERN EUROPE'S IRON CURTAIN



1984: My first official photo as Director of The Bridge

### A Personal Journey by Ragnhild K Ulrich

#### 1983— Christmas and Händel's Messiah

From my seat in the balcony, I glanced around the white cathedral sanctuary festively decorated with hundreds of red poinsettias, filled to capacity with men and women in their best attire. The massive pipe organ at the back of the altar provided a majestic background for the 100 voice choir of *Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church (CRPC)* and its orchestra, as the magnificent annual Christmas performance of Händel's Messiah echoed throughout the building.

Leaning back, while enjoying the rich beauty of the sights and sounds of the music, pondering the profound depth of scripture verses from Isaiah to Revelation describing our Savior, I began sobbing and simply could not stop. It was a heartcry of intercession on behalf of the hundreds of wonderful brothers and sisters I had met from the underground suffering church in countries behind the Iron Curtain while serving a two year tenure with an East European Mission located in München, Germany. Just a few weeks prior to this, I had returned permanently to the States from my stay at the Mission with a commission from the Lord: a vision of a bridge spanning America, Europe, and the Soviet Union with the words, "Return to the States and **be** a Bridge – **do not** build one!" I was to be a voice in the West, representing the believers who were suffering for their faith in the oppressive communist countries, while being a conduit for bringing resources from the believers in the West across this Bridge to the East (2. Cor. 9: 6-15).

During this concert, I had a sense that somehow, in God's providence, He had plans to intertwine His purposes — for the persecuted church behind the Iron Curtain, CRPC and myself.

## THE FALL OF EASTERN EUROPE'S IRON CURTAIN

### 1984 — CRPC MISSIONS CONFERENCE

In late Fall of 1983, after returning from my two year stay in Germany while working behind the Iron Curtain, I re-established myself in Fort Lauderdale. A lovely elderly couple in our local church gave me a condo to rent at a price I could afford. It was in that place, by the help of my church and the Mission in Germany, that the small beginnings of The Bridge originated. It "**happened**" to be located nearby Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church whose dynamic senior pastor, **Dr. D. James Kennedy**, was well known for his strong stand against the evil of atheist communism, calling it a religion.

Through one of the teachers at their school, Westminster Academy, I "**happened**" to be invited to speak to the students on missions. As a result, the following Spring, I "**happened**" to be invited to participate at their annual week-long missions conference whereby missionaries from around the world participated. It culminated in the Missions Sunday service, where I "**happened**" to be chosen from among the missionaries to present the passion for world missions to the congregation.

### MISSION TRIP TO ROMANIA

The Bridge was given a generous donation of \$1,500 for my participation—the exact amount I needed to go on a mission trip to Romania, which I did under the auspices of my friends in Germany. It was one of my many courier trips during which a co-worker and I would clandestinely deliver Bibles and other Christian material to our specific contact persons within the country. This time, the Director in Germany "**happened**" to ask me if I would take a side-trip to the city of **Cluj**, located in **Transylvania** (a part of Romania dominated by ethnic Hungarians, home of the notorious Dracula ) to check out the situation for a persecuted Christian leader who had asked for help.

After the delivery of the pre-scheduled material to our precious believers, my co-worker and I drove through mountains and forests and arrived in **Cluj** late in the eve-

ning so that we could evade the infamous **Securitate** (secret police). We found the address, sneaked into the dingy apartment building, and tapped the secret signal on the appropriate door. A stately, elderly gentleman opened the door and, without a word, waved us into the apartment which indicated that he was a cultured, well read intellectual.

### DR. ISTVAN TOKES

Quietly, in German, **Istvan Tokes** began to tell an incredulous story. He was a senior professor of theology at the Reformed Seminary in town, and had for years been intimidated and threatened by Ceausescu's leaders to collaborate in the government's atheist agenda against the Christian believers. "At times, the pressure became too great; I gave in and helped spread disinformation through the church", he admitted, tears running down his cheeks. He continued, "I have a son, **Laszlo**, who is a youth leader in one of our churches in the city of **Timisoara**. There is revival among the youth there. Watching their faith and courage made me repent, so lately, I have also been openly speaking and standing up for the church of Jesus Christ!"

Istvan then told us that he had learned that government officials had secretly plotted to kill both him and his son — one to be caused by a car accident, the other by radioactive material placed in the door post of his house. He then "**happened**" to hand me a typed three page statement in German, outlining details of Ceausescu's atrocities against the church and a plea for him and his son's life. Would I bring this document to America and give it to influential people, preferably in Washington DC, who could make their situation public? I accepted it, so after we prayed and said goodbye, I took the document, hid it in one of my boots — aware that, if discovered, I might be arrested and charged with Western espionage.

### DR. D. JAMES D. KENNEDY

God had his protective hand over us; we returned safely to Germany, **Cont. on p. 3**

# THE FALL OF EASTERN EUROPE'S IRON CURTAIN

And I went on to the States, but without a clue whom to contact. I did not know any prominent American government officials! I translated the document into English; then I “happened” to remember that the funds for this trip had actually been provided by CRPC — why not contact Dr. Kennedy? I made an appointment, and Dr. valuable Romanian servants of the Lord. Kennedy graciously gave me ample time to present my plea for help to save the lives of these two “What can I do?” he asked. “Please inform people who can give this maximum exposure”, I said, while handing the original and translated documents over to him, “Ceausescu will never kill the two if he knows it will give him bad press in America.” Dr. Kennedy promised to pursue the matter. I left, confident that the Tokes family were in God’s hands and under His protective wings.

## 1987 — WEDDING AND FOOD PARCELS

With my partners, in the ensuing years, I kept building the network of relationships of The Bridge international domestically and internationally. Our powerful bi-monthly intercessory group prayed continually throughout the eighties that God would smash the Iron Curtain and open the doors for the Gospel. The believers kept suffering!

In 1987, when Steve and I married, we asked that our family and friends, in lieu of wedding gifts, donate a monetary gift to The Bridge for food parcels for starving Christian families in Romania, and over \$6,000 was sent overseas. Since then, Steve and I have lived in South Florida and continue to serve the nations with the Gospel through The Bridge on one hand, while doing business on the other.

## 1989 — FALL OF THE IRON CURTAIN

In the late eighties we watched news reports on freedom movements that began emerging in Eastern Europe — from the Pope’s visit to Poland and the Solidarity uprising led by Lech Walesa, to an intensifying wave that, in the Fall of 1989, caused a largely bloodless political upheaval in Poland, continued in Hungary, then led to a surge of mostly

peaceful revolutions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. Romania was the only Eastern Bloc country to overthrow its communist regime violently and execute its head of state.

## ROMANIA’S NICOLAE CEAUSESCU

Nothing matched what happened in Romania! For his 21 years as Romania’s president, Nicolae Ceausescu, one of Communism’s most cruel and oppressive dictators, kept up a reign of fear, suppressing all opposition with the help of the brutal Securitate, with the largest network of spies and informers in Eastern Europe. In December 1989, his downfall came as a result of his violent overreaction to public unrest over issues such as food shortages. A week later, I read an article in a major newsmagazine which featured Romania’s bloody revolution and revealed an incredulous tale. Following is a summary of events:

## LASZLO TOKES — THE MAN WHO SPARKED THE REVOLUTION

It began on December 15 with demonstrations in the western city of Timisoara against the harassment of a dissident ethnic-Hungarian Reformed Church pastor, Laszlo Tokes, who had the courage to speak up against the atrocities in his country. On that day, an order was served to remove Laszlo from his post, causing his congregation to demonstrate against the order, which was violently put down by government security forces. The revolt blazed a trail to Bucharest and the rest of the country. This soon swelled into a massive protest, in which slogans like “We want bread” soon turned into “Down with Ceausescu”.

Ceausescu sought to restore his own authority, but amid bloody street battles on December 22, an angry mass of people stormed Ceausescu’s offices. He fled by helicopter, but was seized outside the city. In a summary court martial held in secret, he and his wife, Elena, were accused of ordering the deaths of 60,000 people, and on Christmas Day were shot to death.

## FROM R.K.’S CORNER

Ephesians 2:10 declares, “for we are His (God’s) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Have you noticed that these good works are most of the time not bombastic, earth-shattering events, but sometimes a string of day-to-day “happenings”? They are likened to a woven tapestry; we see only the pattern on the top side, but on the underside the Master Weaver has intricately interwoven connections of the threads which each represent a human life. When we as believers live in harmony with God and one another and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, His purposes are accomplished on this earth!

**The Lord did the greatest miracle in the history of mankind — the birth of Jesus, by revealing Himself to a young maiden who simply responded, “Lord, let it be to me according to your will”. She bought forth EMMANUEL, God with Us!**

As my gift to you this Christmas, I am sharing a true story from my life involving a Mission Director in Germany, a Theology Professor and his Pastor son in Romania, Dr. D. James Kennedy of Fort Lauderdale, FL, and myself. The “happenings” in each of our lives intersected, and, unknowingly at the time, we each had a part in helping spare the life of a young Romanian Pastor who later became the sparkplug in bringing down the Iron Curtain in Romania!

## BLESSED CHRISTMAS FROM STEVE, R.K. AND THE BRIDGE TEAM

... Cont. Dr. D. James Kennedy recounts in one of his books, “Interestingly, in the providence of God, I may have had a small hand in that situation. In the mid-1980s, I had been asked by a woman missionary, working behind the Iron Curtain, to write a letter to Nicolae Ceausescu. She wanted me to tell him to stop harassing two pastors in Romania — a father and son (who was a youth minister). Frankly, I felt such a letter would be in vain. Why would a Communist dictator hundreds of miles away listen to an American preacher? But I wrote it anyway, and I mentioned that the eyes of the world would be on the situation. After the tyrant’s fall, I received a note from the missionary thanking me for that letter—a letter I had forgotten all about. She said that after my correspondence, “although the harassments did not stop against the Tokes family, they had diminished. The important part is that their lives were spared.”<sup>iii</sup> The name of the youth minister was Laszlo Tokes — the very man who had been instrumental in the fall of Communism in Romania!

On December 16, 2009, on the occasion of the anniversary of 20 years since the fall of the communist regime, U.S. Ambassador to Bucharest, Mark Gitenstein, compared Laszlo Tokes with Martin Luther King. “When Laszlo appeared in the window and gestured his followers to come close, he was not aware that the Romanian revolution started at that moment. With that simple sign of encouragement he said in fact: ‘Come here and let’s confront tyranny’. The same as Martin Luther King and Rosei Parks, Laszlo Tokes inspired those who were deprived of any right, to exert their God given rights, and so he gave the signal of the Revolution’s start”.



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