



Travel Letter II from R.K. Ulrich

Kyrgyzstan



With young Kyrgyz intellectuals on fire for Jesus!

On Thursday August 18, we said goodbye temporarily to Kazakhstan, climbed into one of Agape's van with Alexander, our driver, at the wheel. He is the wonderful warmhearted fellow I mentioned in the September issue who had been a heroin addict for 17 years, but now is full of the love of Jesus. The only evidence of the rough life he had come from were the many tattoos on his arms and fingers. He took us across the steppes (the mountain plateau of Central Asia) from Almaty, Kazakhstan across the border into **Kyrgyzstan** to the capital city of **Bishkek**.

Looking out of the window of our van, I was taken by the wide expanse of soft, rolling hills covered by short, dry grass, folding into one another. Toward the end of the day, the long shadows of the afternoon sun made the landscape look like a huge velvet cloth that had been crunched together on a large surface. In the background, the hills are steeper as they stretch toward the snowcapped mountains that frame the horizon. Here and there in the distance you can see a Kazakh village surrounded by grazing livestock and horses, a few yurts (tent-like living quarters) scattered in the fields, and a few shepherds on horse guiding the sheep — always with one goat leading the way. A strange sight! I felt I could hear the whisper of the untold numbers of ethnic groups who, across the history of the millennia, charged full force on horseback back and forth across these steppes to conquer and to search for a new land and a better life.



It is a five hour drive between Almaty and Bishkek, but it was a physically challenging trip. The road which crested at 2,030 meters (app. 6,100 feet), is in the process of being transformed from a poorly maintained Soviet style country road to a modern highway. At times, the detours tossed us around violently.

Kyrgyzstan is far smaller and poorer than Kazakhstan. Predominantly covered by mountains, only 7% of the land is arable. The native Kyrgyz people are a cousin, if you will, of the Kazakh people. Both of Turkic extraction, they share similar languages and customs, but the Kyrgyz seem to be more committed to their Islamic Shamanism's traditions than the Kazakhs. The population of 5 million has 3.5 mill Kyrgyz, 1.2 mill Russians and a handful of other ethnic groups. In both countries, there is a resurgence of nationalism and identity away from the atheist Soviet man since the fall of communism. It is causing the people to search for spiritual reality, although materialism is growing in a booming economy.

I have been familiar with **The Church of Jesus Christ** in Bishkek through partners and coworkers for over a decade, but this was my first visit to Bishkek in person. It was therefore very special for me to see the fruit of the Gospel among them! **Vasily Kusin**, a young Baptist believer under communism came into a fresh relation-

ship with the Holy Spirit and was asked to leave his church. He started a new church in 1992, a few months before a Bridge team visited Kyrgyzstan to evangelize and saw a few young people receive Jesus. Subsequently, we continued to care for this small flock by sending people to teach and counsel them. These young people met Vasily and began serving with him in his church.

In 1994, The Bridge helped sponsor a Bible school for them for a period of time. While in Bishkek, I met several of the initial group of the 20 Bible school alumni. Today, they are all strong Christian leaders within the church, in politics and in business. On behalf of the group, those I met expressed a deep gratitude toward the American people, both teachers and sponsors, who had helped them grow toward mature faith during their early years as believers. *"The time at the school caused the most significant growth in my spiritual life"* was the consensus.

From this small beginning 13 years ago, there is now a mega-church of 11,000 believers! They either gather in the main church, one of the largest and most beautiful buildings in the center of Bishkek, in one of the six micro-district churches in the city, or in one of the 60 district churches located in other parts of the country.

The church members are teeming with life, joy, and excitement in winning others for Christ. The key to their growth is



that, as soon as one group grows in size, the leader separates a team and sends them out to evangelize and plant a new church elsewhere. Their heart for the lost and their healthy view of persecution is keeping their faith strong and vibrant. "Persecution is good for us, for every time we are being harassed, our church grows", said Allie, Pastor Kusun's right hand administrative assistant who cared for us while we were there. She is a fireball — half Russian, half Kyrgyz — who speaks fluent American and was our guide and interpreter during our stay. Allie's husband, Dennis, pastors one of the micro district churches. His heart is evangelism among the young, and he is quite innovative in reaching them with the Good News.

We were extremely warmly and well received in every way. The conference was conducted in the main church in Bishkek



Our team with the main Pastoral leadership

which seats app. 800. It was a delight to discover that the conference was a fully Kyrgyz event (there are app. 1,500 Kyrgyz believers in the congregation). The Russians had preferred them as they generally receive less ministry and have less resources. The beautiful banners that were part of the inspiring dance ministry during the very vibrant worship were all in the Kyrgyz language.

John Sheasby's message was very timely and the people were wide open to his teaching on the Father's love and our inheritance in Christ. They were intensely attentive and received revelations of the Biblical truth for themselves. During times of prayer, people were liberated and testified later that both physical and emotional heal-

ings had taken place. "What I have received I give away", is one of the principles of receiving more from the Lord," John said. He then demonstrated how to receive more of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and give it to others. He was tireless as he taught morning, afternoon and night through the entire weekend, including Monday morning. Beverley was right at his side all the time while being supportive in prayer and participating in ministry when they later met with various groups of leaders. She is a real trooper and great role model for young women anywhere.

On Sunday, while John and Beverley were ministering at the main church, Hanny and I went to a village church app. 60 miles out of town to preach and minister there. It was wonderful! The 50-60 believers were gathered in the courtyard under a tarp stretched between the small

wooden houses in the compound. It was hot and sticky, but oh, what a sweet presence of the Lord among them! The translation of the service bypassed Russian and was done directly from English into Kyrgyz. This made the people more receptive and willing to participate as they were relating to their God, not the Russian's God! I was impressed at the genuineness and depth of their faith, being aware that when a Kyrgyz accepts Christ in a village or small town, he or she is shunned by their family and community. Their lives are sometimes threatened. The women in particular, experience much emotional, and often physical, abuse.

While in Bishkek, I had an opportunity to meet with the 25-30

FROM THE EDITOR

This is part two of the travel letter which began in the September issue of The Bridge Report, and is concluded in this. Last month, I reported from Kazakhstan; this issue focuses on our time in Kyrgyzstan. I had invited John Sheasby to be the main speaker at a three day week-end conference in each country with the message God has given him on the grace and love of our Heavenly Father and all the riches that are available to us in His son, Jesus. He and his wife, Beverley, stayed for two weeks, whereas Hanny — a Swiss friend from Canada — and I stayed ten days longer

After the Sheasbys left, I had opportunity to visit with other Bridge partners in Kazakhstan: Sargon Daniali who works among Farsi- and Turkish-speaking ethnic groups, and Yermek Balykbekov who serves with his wife among his own Kazakh people in the city of Karaganda. I also met with several Western missionaries who serve faithfully in Almaty. It was wonderful to speak to the congregation of Agape Church the last Sunday I was there. The Gospel is indeed prospering in Central Asia!

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1994 Bible school Alumni

young intellectuals and business people who were participating in the conference. At first, due to lack of a good interpreter, things were going slowly. When I began speaking about the importance that they search and find their identity in Christ through their own language and culture as God has laid down an aspect of His nature uniquely into each ethnic group, there was an eruption of excitement and everyone began sharing their thoughts and ideas, and they had a lot of questions. "God has buried a pearl deep into the Kyrgyz heart, and you are the ones to dig to find it and share it with your people. You are the generation whom God has called to redeem your culture for God's Kingdom", I said. We had a fruitful dialogue on integrity, which is extremely relevant in this emerging country where corruption is knee high from the President down the line to the grassroots of the people. It was obvious that I touched the anointing of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. It was great to have a moment's influence among Kyrgyzstan's future leaders and feel their enthusiasm in being a witness for Christ through their talents!



Ragnild K. Ulrich ("R.K.")
Executive Director

13762 State Road 84, Suite 423
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33325

USA

Tel 1-954-916-0521

Fax 1-954-916-8740

E-Mail:

TheBridge@BridgeInternational.org

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