



## LIYA CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

### Liya's Story

By Dr. Tony Cupit

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***Liya, we love you very much. God loves you very much. The doctors tell us that the medicines are not helping you anymore. So, when Jesus comes to you and puts out his hand, you take it and go with him, and wait for us.***

I often recount those incredibly courageous and haunting words in sermons and talks I give around the world. The words were whispered to a 13-year old child dying of cancer in a hospital ward in Washington, D.C. by her mother, with the father standing alongside. Every time I tell the story and quote the words, my eyes brim with tears. Inevitably, those in the congregation or other meetings who absorb the words, are deeply moved. I often see people wiping their eyes or reaching for their tissues. In the Baptist church in Denia, Spain, when I told about Liya's death and reiterated her mother's brave words at the bedside, the translator was so overcome she could barely get the words out. Not surprisingly, therefore, the congregation was in tears! A senior American Baptist pastor who heard me tell the story in Kohima, Nagaland said the story was the best illustration he had ever encountered of the transition from life to death (or is it life to life?).

But the story of Liya is a lot more than heroic and faithful parents committing their dying daughter to the grace and mercy of God. The story of Liya is the story of a child whose life barely reached teenage who, nonetheless, influenced and continues to influence countless people. Liya Dovgalyuk was a very precious and special person. Liya's mother recalls the words of her pastor in Riga, Latvia when Liya was just a baby. Seeing her unusual attentiveness and her sparkling eyes, the pastor concluded even then that Liya was a very special little girl.

In 1989 a Baptist World Alliance (BWA) delegation visited Eastern Europe and one of the countries visited was Latvia, a Baltic country, which at that stage was still under the thrall of the Soviet Union. With its neighboring Baltic nations, Estonia and Lithuania, Latvia had never willingly accepted the domination of the Soviets and only by brute force was it imprisoned within the Communist system. It regarded itself more as Western than Eastern and at one stage, Latvia's capital city, Riga, was regarded as the Paris of the Eastern world. Riga is a beautiful city whose former glory, despite decades of



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economic malaise and Communist mismanagement, can still be seen. Indeed, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and Latvia's freedom from the Soviet system, Riga has again become a beautiful and modern city. But in 1989, it was a shadow of its former self—gray, desolate and foreboding.

There existed in 1989 a flourishing, though small Baptist union of churches, mostly ethnic Latvian, but with two Russian-speaking congregations. The leadership of the Union was basically Latvian, but the Russian congregations were part of the Baptist family in Latvia even though, with the rapidly changing political climate, Russians and Ukrainians living in Latvia were beginning to feel a little insecure. The beginnings of the struggle for Latvian independence were in the air, and Russians and Ukrainians were seen as occupiers.

Beth MacClaren was Director of the BWA Women's Department and a part of a delegation to Latvia. After she attended a service in one of the Russian-speaking Baptist congregations in Riga, a family that had both Russian and Ukrainian roots hosted Beth and another BWA Director, Archie Goldie, to dinner. They quickly realized they were hosted by outstanding people. Mikhail Dovgalyuk, his wife Lyuba and four children, sat around the table and while only Lyuba could converse in English, and that somewhat haltingly, the visitors were transfixed by the depth of the Christian faith and the quality of family life in that Rigan Baptist home. And this was six-year old Liya's first contact with a world outside Latvia.

The Dovgalyuks shared with Beth MacClaren and Archie Goldie the anxieties associated with being Russian/Ukrainian in Latvia where the long dormant, but never extinguished nationalism was beginning to assert itself. As a last show of strength in their waning empire, Russian tanks were strutting their stuff to the anger of the Latvian people. The Dovgalyuks explained that being Russian/Ukrainian and Evangelical Christians was difficult, for not only was Latvia an atheistic state where people of any religion were treated as second-class citizens, Baptists were just a tiny minority in the nation. If Latvians had been allowed to practice religion without restriction the country would have been overwhelmingly Lutheran or Russian Orthodox. So, as non-Latvian -speaking Baptist Christians the Dovgalyuks had much to contend with. Opportunities for their children's education were unpredictable and as all their four children were extremely talented musically, Mikhail and Lyuba were wondering how they could do the very best for their family's future. The family consisted of the parents, Mikhail and Lyuba, three fine young lads, Timofey, Pavel and Yevgeniy and their much-loved daughter, Liya.

When more than one hundred and fifty delegates from Eastern Europe attended the Baptist World Congress in Seoul, Korea in July 1990, and of that large number only a handful were women, Lyuba, a Russian/Ukrainian, born in Latvia, was chosen to be one of those delegates. She sang and played piano at the Women's Department meetings in Seoul.

The visit of Beth MacClaren to Riga was fortuitous for it opened up a possible window of opportunity to the Dovgalyuks for a different (and given the situation in Latvia then), better way of life. Lyuba is a personable, persuasive and forward-thinking woman and it is not surprising that she would have inquired of her visitor from the BWA about the possibility of emigration to the United States. There was no better person to whom she could have spoken, for Beth not only is a good judge of character, she is a person



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who sees potential in others and affirms and encourages people more than most. So Beth promised she would look into the possibility.

Beth had two good strings to her bow. Not only was she a Director of the BWA, Beth was a member, and had served on staff at one stage, of the McLean Baptist Church in Northern Virginia USA. This church, though not particularly large, had a history of innovative ministry and was and is, made up of people who are leaders in government, commerce and industry and who are used to taking risks. So Beth used the good offices of the BWA, and her contacts in her local church, to help pursue the dream of the Dovgalyuk family to migrate to Northern Virginia.

Eventually all the paperwork was completed with yeoman assistance from a Baptist layman who worked for a US Congressman, Allen Martin, himself a member of the McLean Church. The family applied to emigrate under the category of "religious persecution" and Allen Martin dealt with all the INS processes. After two years, permission was granted for the family from Riga to fly to the USA. Liya, by then eight, was, according to her parents, the most excited of all.

But the Family needed somewhere to stay and housing six newcomers from Latvia, only one of whom had even a modicum of the English language, was going to be a challenge. McLean Baptist church members, Mike and Marilyn Scott living in a spacious home in Great Falls, Virginia generously agreed to be the hosts even though they too had four children, not three boys and a girl like the Dovgalyuks but three girls and a boy! The Scotts not only had the opportunity to learn to communicate with people from another culture and in another language, they had the responsibility of seeking to interpret American ways to people whose entire lives had been lived under Communism. They have good memories of Liya during the weeks the family stayed with the Scotts. For instance, Thanksgiving was celebrated two weeks after the family's arrival. Liya had begun school and had made a pilgrim's costume at school. Family and friends gathered at the Scotts' house. Liya, a newcomer from Latvia, was unselfconsciously cute washing the dishes at the kitchen sink, dressed in the quintessential American pioneer outfit. At Christmas, the family recalls, Liya was so excited to receive, among a surfeit of gifts, a Barbie doll—again, a symbol of a new and totally different way of life to what she had experienced in economically deprived Latvia. Despite inevitable challenges, a lasting bond developed between the two families so different in many ways, but with a common Baptist Christian faith.

The McLean congregation had heard a lot about the impending arrival of the six from Latvia to the church and they were warmly welcomed in November 1991. Few families have made such an impact on the McLean church since their arrival. On their first Sunday, the pastor, Michael Catlett, invited the family to come forward and for Lyuba, as the one with a little English, to bring a few words of greeting. A few weeks later, Lyuba sang one of the solo parts in the Christmas presentation of Handel's "Messiah" and the children, with their mother accompanying on piano, were soon playing occasional musical selections in church, with Timofey on clarinet, Pavel on cello and Yevgeniy and Liya playing violin. Mikhail was appointed deacon within a few years, remarkable progress, considering his complete lack of any English when he arrived in the USA.

The children were making: a real contribution to the musical life of the McLean Baptist Church. It was not only unusual to have five members from the one family playing before a congregation, their music



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was of a particularly high standard. Liya, eight years old when she arrived, held her own with her brothers and was obviously something of a child prodigy on violin. The mother and three boys in those early days conveyed something of the sober, stoical demeanor of Eastern Europe but Liya could not contain her enthusiasm for the music nor hide her joyful nature, and a grin would often slide across her face as she spied a friend in the congregation.

The Dovgalyuk family may not be another Von Trapp, "Sound of Music" type unit (Mikhail for example, has no pretensions to being musical), but they are enormously talented. Two of the boys, Pavel and Yevgeniy, will end up being professional musicians in some fashion. With a mother and four children being so gifted, and with the strong and immensely proud support of their father, the family has conducted many concerts over the years, first in the McLean Baptist Church, which was a memorable occasion, but in other significant venues as well publicity pictures reveal a smiling and confident Liya, still young and small, standing alongside her gifted family members as a vital part of the family concert group.

A fortuitous meeting at a supermarket checkout counter introduced the Dovgalyuks to the National Symphony Orchestra and the famous Levine School of Music. Lyuba heard a man speaking in Russian and found it to be Lev Pekarsky, a violinist with the NSO. His son, Pavel, another NSO violinist, became Liya's violin teacher and opened up opportunities for Liya's gifted siblings. The regard in which Liya was held at the Levine School is obvious through the words in a letter from its Director:

Dear Liya,

Today you made me so proud to be a musician. Seeing you stand there before the orchestra, with so much confidence and energy, made me remember the days when this would not have been possible. Please tell your teacher that you played like an artist. Your tone was warm and rich; the line was long and flowing; technique was not apparent as you made even the most difficult passage seem simple; and you truly performed instead of just playing. Your beautiful smile at the end of the performance was my personal gift today. Seeing you so happy, so satisfied with life, made me soar with emotion.

Through the Make a Wish Foundation after Liya was diagnosed with cancer, the family had the opportunity to revisit their family and friends in Latvia in 1994. This musical family, including Liya, gave a concert at the famous Dome Cathedral in Riga and worshipped in the Baptist church where the children had grown up before moving to America.

The family has maintained its links with the BWA, whose leaders were influential in the initial plans for the family's emigration and has been featured, through its music, at BWA annual banquets in North Virginia. Lyuba organized and accompanied an Eastern European Baptist choir that sang on the last night of the Baptist World Congress in Melbourne, Australia in January 2000.

The youngest son, Yevgeniv, has performed as a soloist in the Kennedy Center on violin and was Concertmaster when a student at the George Mason University. Pavel is a capable composer as well as excelling on cello. The music world is the poorer because of the untimely death of Liya in 1996, for to the untrained layperson at least, Liya, on violin, may well have been as good or even better than her illustrious brothers. At age eight she could play Mozart's 4th Concerto without a score (her favorite



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composer was Felix Mendelssohn because he not only became an adult convert to Christianity, he played and conducted without the use of a score). Her teachers agreed that Liya had the most natural stance and holding position for violin and she not only loved her music she was meticulous in her practice, preparation and performance. At the Spring Hill Elementary School, Liya was appointed Concertmaster. She was a key performer in a quintet at the school which is now called the Liya Quintet and children vie to be chosen to perform in this prestigious group. Each child who is chosen is told the story of this child prodigy who, before her death, influenced so many, not only by her music but by the quality of her life.

To the despair of the family and the congregation, a sore knee that was bothering Liya not too many months after her arrival in the US, was diagnosed as cancer, an Ewing's sarcoma, and suddenly this beautiful young girl, already beloved in the church and elsewhere, had an evil, life-threatening force working malevolently in her body. That came as a devastating blow to everyone it seemed, except to Liya. Never did she betray her distress or, outside the home at least, complain about her sickness. The overwhelming memory of Liya even during her four years of struggle against cancer is one of a lovely young girl, always smiling and always attentive to others. Her parents, not prone to hyperbole, portray her as an easy child to raise, who (unlike her siblings, they say) never needed to be disciplined.

My wife recounts the occasion when she was preparing a Sunday church lunch and being short staffed, had fallen behind in her preparations. She needed the cutlery to be distributed around the tables and asked some of the young people if they could help. Young people have far too many other things on their minds at church on a Sunday morning and for various reasons they all excused themselves. A moment later, Liya sidled up to Margaret and asked if she could do anything to help and ended up putting all the cutlery around by herself. I also have memories of a delightful young girl helping me set the wood for our fire when the family visited our home - nothing was a chore for Liya. Every night, as a two-year old back in Latvia, Liya used to wait till everyone was in bed, including her parents, and go to each bed to see that everyone was all right before she put herself to bed. At that young age, Liya, on one occasion, sang three verses of a hymn in church, without a mistake either in the words or in the tune. As she grew older, she would regularly make her Father's breakfast. There are probably other, more significant illustrations of the type of young girl Liya was. Suffice to say, she was loved by all who knew her.

But was Liya a saint? Of course not. She was a beautiful young person, with a strong Christian faith (as a young girl in Riga she would not leave the home until she had prayed with one of the adults), who had a smile and a cheerful greeting for everyone. She was an extremely talented musician. She was popular and charming - but not altogether different from countless young people all over the world. Then why write her story? Why is her memory so fragrant to the members of the McLean Baptist Church and to so many others? Why has a camp and conference center in the Rivne Region of Ukraine been named in her honor? (Liya's Christian Ministry Center - also named Liya's Children's Camp.) Why does her picture sit on our mantelpiece and I suspect, on the mantelpieces and in the hearts of so many whose lives she briefly touched in the just over 12 years of her life?

It is a danger when someone as attractive and winsome as Liya passes away, especially when it is at a young age, to confer a status on that person beyond what is sensible and reasonable. There was a time at our church, following her death, when Liya was in danger of attaining an angelic aura about her that does



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not do justice to the fact that she was a fun loving, young girl who unfortunately contracted cancer - and ultimately died from the side-effects of fighting the cancer.

Ironically, every Christmas, a beautiful, golden figure of an angel is suspended in the front of the church sanctuary - and more than one person has thought of Liya as they have gazed at that figure of an angel. But as sweet and popular as Liya was, she was not, at least while living with family and playing with church and school friends, too much different from them. But on the other hand who knows the form one takes when one grasps the hand of Jesus and "goes with him" as Liya did in July 1996. Maybe - just maybe - Liya is indeed, an angel now (or if heaven allows anything higher, then Liya is that!)

Liya had struggled with cancer for four long years. She went through all the tests, procedures and therapy that cancer patients endure including chemotherapy. She went under the surgeon's knife. She wore baseball caps at one stage to cover her lack of hair. She suffered discomfort and pain. Yet her outward demeanor continued to be of a happy, balanced and likeable young person. She did not regard the cancer eating away at her body as something to evoke pity or to serve as an excuse for complaint. To the outsider unaware of her struggle, Liya was a gifted, normal little girl fast developing into a young woman.

The prestigious newspaper, The Washington Post, became aware of the musical talent and the struggle against cancer Liya was fighting. In its Style section, in an article written by Jacqueline Trescott entitled The Young Patient's Healing Melody the following account appeared:

*The midday sun from the atrium skylight of Children's National Medical Center illuminates her rose petal cheeks. She sits on a folding chair, one hand firmly clasping her violin and the other brushing her long taffeta skirt. She turns and smiles at her mother, glances coyly at her classmates, and then waves briefly at the doctors who saved her right leg. It's time for Liya Dovyalyuk's solo in this special mini-concert and she plays the Bach Concerto in A Minor crisply, barely taking her eyes off the music. The front row is filled with young patients, some smaller than she was when the doctors found a rare bone cancer in her knee. . . Around her the hospital staff watches and silently roots for her, joyous at the sight of their former patient, once shrunken, now bubbling. When Liya finishes she gets two sustained standing ovations. She bathes the crowd with a victorious grin....*

The article explained that Liya had undergone chemotherapy at Children's Hospital, had six inches of bone removed and a prosthesis inserted. Eighteen months after the first operation, her other knee required surgery because it was not growing normally. Slowly Liya learned to walk again and to bend her knee enough to ride a bike. Poignantly, the newspaper account summed up by declaring that a full recovery was a strong possibility. That same newspaper, in a fundraiser for the Children's Hospital conducted annually and led by well-known correspondent, Bob Levey, recounted Liya's struggle against cancer and her own contribution to the fund-raising effort. Liya with her talented and hard-working family members contributed, through their music, to a number of significant charitable fund-raising efforts. Part of the



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reason for the story in the Washington Post may have been the granting to Liya the previous day, by President Bill Clinton, a President's Education Award.

But eventually the tumor could not be kept at bay. The long hours of treatment, the time-consuming visits to medical facilities, the radical surgery on her leg, the consuming of expensive drugs, the continual medical treatments by the most eminent medical practitioners, were not having the desired effect. The love and prayers of God's people were a great comfort to the family but the cancer had Liya's body entwined in a remorseless and vice-like grip and it wasn't going to let go. The drugs to fight the cancer weakened Liya's heart and reduced her immunity against disease. Ultimately, a fungal infection brought about her passing from this world to the next.

Liya was admitted to the Children's Hospital in Washington D.C. on Father's Day, June 17, 1996 where specialists made one more valiant attempt to save or at least prolong Liya's life. For three weeks she struggled between life and death. There were moments of good news when the treatment seemed for a time to offer hope, only to be followed by the crushing realization that Liya's life was inexorably slipping away. Plans to remove her to another facility were made - and then unmade. Everything possible was attempted.

The McLean church members, school teachers and others, gathered around Mikhail and Lyuba, offering love, assurance of prayers and practical assistance. A large number of friends, day by day, night by night, gathered with the immediate family around the bedside where Liya, her mouth and nose impregnated with tubes, smiled wanly at us, understanding what was being said, but unable to respond verbally.

Eventually the doctors came to Mikhail and Lyuba with the shattering news that Liya was soon to die. We had hoped and prayed for a miracle but on this occasion and with this special person the miracle we were desiring, even demanding, was not about to happen.

So, with enormous courage and faith, the parents knelt at the bedside of their darling daughter and Lyuba mouthed the words to Liya, in Russian, that began this story. Liya's mother in expressing those words and sentiment was unwittingly echoing the poignant words of another mother, the beautiful Cosette's mother, Fantine, in Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables." Fantine implored Jean Valjean to "tell Cosette I love her and will see her when I wake up."

And so Liya went to be with God. Liya was freed from her pain. The Lord Jesus, whom she had come to know and love, led her into the Father's presence. News of Liya's death reached the McLean Church during the Sunday morning worship service. At its conclusion, Associate Pastor, Connie Stinson, conveyed the sad news to the congregation. The fact that the church members were together enabled them to grieve together, to pray for the Dovgalyuk family and to give thanks to God for the life of this special child. Within minutes, Margaret and I, sitting in a hotel room in Hong Kong, were telephoned with the news. We grieved from the other side of the world and gave thanks for our own memories of Liya.

Funeral services at the McLean church are always a wonderful affirmation of the life and memory of the person who has died. Liya's service was no exception. A huge crowd gathered, the church was packed, not only with family, Sunday school friends, and church members, but also with members of the musical



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world, Mikhail's and Lyuba's work colleagues and also a large contingent of staff and students from Liya's school, the Spring Hill Elementary School. An article in a local newspaper is worth noting:

There was a time set aside in the service for those who wished to speak about her. . . people rose to their feet and told, sometimes through their tears, what she (Liya) had meant to them. "She changed my life," "she was always smiling," "she was so brave," "I remember when we played Bach together," "she was so talented but so humble."

Her school teachers and classmates told of how Liya knew so much more than they about music, but never pushed her knowledge ahead of theirs. One read a poem she had composed. One young boy talked of his personal pain at Liya's death. The tributes went on and on. It seemed that everyone in that crowded church wanted to speak about her.

The entire ceremony was an outpouring of love and identification with the Dovgalyuk family and an expression of thanksgiving to God that one beautiful life had touched so many lives in such a short period of time. Tributes and expressions of love and appreciation continued to pour in. The Levine School of Music dedicated its 1996/7 season of the Honors program to her memory. In its letter announcing this, the co-chairs of the Honors program wrote:

We remember the wonderful contribution to our lives through her musicianship and her unending strength of character... Her spirit will be always present.

Words on the published program read:

Her eyes always danced. And in the midst of her darkest moments, there was always a look from Liya that made you feel you were the only person in her beautiful world ...you shall be our model, Liya, and our inspiration. We love you.

Liya was awarded, posthumously, the Sydney Shapiro Violin Scholarship at the Levine School and a memorial service in Liya's honor was held at the Children's National Medical Center. The Spring Hill Elementary School commissioned a five-movement orchestral piece dedicated to the memory of its much-loved Liya, "The Latvian Sinfonia."

The family has remained strong and united but a gaping hole has been left. Liya's was a shining presence, a much-loved child, and the grief of the family can never be known. Those emotions are just too deep to probe. Yet with all that, they have the consolation of their faith and the knowledge that for 13 precious years they were granted the stewardship of a remarkable young girl whose life and love will never be forgotten. They were inundated with letters from near and far testifying to the impact Liya's life had made upon the letter writers. Among many beautiful letters perhaps the following words from two of them sum up the thoughts of many others:





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In her few short years she touched more people with beauty and joy than most people ever do... quality of life is more important than its length... she always radiated humility and hope... she was truly one of the most beautiful children I have ever seen.

The other comes from one of Liya's school teachers:

Liya's music was an outward symbol of the beauty which lay under the façade of her pretty face and pleasant personality. Liya's music was awe-inspiring but to focus on her music was to behold only one tiny facet of the jewel which was Liya. She put a smile on my face every day I saw her. In all my years I have known no other person to be Liya's equal.

The recounting of the story of Liya's death has some amazing consequences. Marilyn Scott, who, with her family, hosted the Dovgalyuks when they first arrived in America, had come to love Liya. When Liya contracted cancer, Marilyn was bewildered and even angry that this should happen to such a sweet, innocent child. Some years later Marilyn accompanied me on a BWA mission visit to India where we visited a colony of destitute lepers living without shelter by the side of the road. I was asked to offer a word of encouragement to this emaciated, pitiable people - not an easy task. So I told those disadvantaged people, beggars, living without hope on the scrap heap of life, the inspiring story of the life and death of Liya Dovgalyuk. I emphasized the hope of the believer even in the most depressing circumstances, while realizing that their circumstances could hardly be worse. They sat and listened intently and perhaps a glimmer of hope could be seen in their eyes as they heard the story of Liya - and of her courageous parents.

Back in the McLean church Marilyn testified, from the pulpit, with tears, that in hearing Liya's story while sitting by a dusty road with a group of lepers in India, she had found a sense of personal healing. The residual anger that Liya had been stricken with cancer and died so young had been dealt with. In the midst of grinding poverty, God had granted a grieving woman understanding, acceptance and peace.

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Eventually young people grow up and marry and the Dovgalyuk's eldest son Timofey married Andrea Horner, also from the McLean Baptist church, in the year 2000. This seemingly unconnected event was a catalyst for another chapter in the short yet influential life of Liya.

Timofey and Andrea were born on opposite sides of the globe, Andrea in the USA, Timofey in Latvia. Both families of the Dovgalyuk parents were originally from Ukraine. Political events, including the mass movement of people, were among the reasons that Mikhail had been forced to migrate to Riga, Latvia.

Lyuba's father was a Christian believer living in his native Ukraine when Stalin was dictator in the Soviet Union. Simply because he was a Baptist believer he was suddenly sentenced to 15 years prison in a Siberian jail, one of countless unsung believers who suffered for their faith in Christ under the



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Communist tyranny. Stalin died when Lyuba's father had completed 12 years of his sentence and along with thousands of others he was granted an amnesty. However, neither Russia nor Ukraine would readmit him (he was regarded as an enemy of the State). He had a brother in Riga, Latvia, so he joined that brother and his Baptist congregation.

Lyuba's mother was Russian and during World War II, lived and worked on a railway train that followed the Russian armies that were fighting the Germans in Russia and "mopped up" as the armies retreated from a city or other war-torn area. Her train was her home. She had no other. When the war finally ended, her train happened to be in Riga, Latvia, and that is where she was unceremoniously deposited. She managed to secure work in a store where she was befriended by two remarkable Russian Baptist women missionaries who encouraged this friendless, refugee woman to come to their church. Without this intersection of events, for it was in that church that Lyuba's mother and father met (and where Lyuba met Mikhail), the story of Liya would not need to be told!

Andrea Dovgalyuk's father and mother, Pat and Melinda Horner, wanted very much to get acquainted with Timofey's roots and to meet the members of Timofey's family who still lived in Ukraine, especially Mikhail's parents. So with Mikhail and Lyuba, Pat Homer traveled to the Rivne region of Ukraine in 1998. It was a most significant visit, for as well as bonding with Mikhail's parents and other family and friends, Pat Horner made a decision while in Ukraine that was to have two notable results. First, it helped perpetuate the memory of Liya Dovgalyuk for it was decided to name a proposed new project in Ukraine in honor of Liya. Second, it set in motion a chain of events that has resulted in literally thousands of Ukrainian children having the opportunity for summer holiday experiences at the Liya's Children's Camp at Malevo in the Demydivskiy District, Rivne region of Ukraine.

When the family group and Pat Horner visited Rivne, it was hosted by boyhood friends of Mikhail, Vyacheslav Nesteruk, who served as Superintendent for the Baptist churches in the Rivne Region of Ukraine and, Mikola Havzilyuk, a pastor who heads up a program of Theological Education by Extension. Pat was deeply moved by the Baptist churches and the work he observed in the region and in consultation with Superintendent Nesteruk, inquired whether there were any particular projects that were regarded as crucial to the future development of the work.

One project appealed greatly to Pat as the sort of ministry that he and his wife might be prepared to support with some significant finance, the development of a Baptist camp for Ukrainian children at the center called Malevo. The Baptists had owned a building on a beautiful and spacious block of land until it was taken over by the Communist authorities and turned into a state medical facility. The building was unused, as the medical facility no longer operated. If the Baptists could secure the funds, they were told they could regain the property, including the buildings belonging to the property. If they did, there would be the potential not only for a church building but for a creative use of the other buildings and the property as well.

Pat Homer, along with Mikhail and Lyuba Dovgalyuk, felt the Baptists of Rivne were making a good case and that the project had immense potential. The Malevo Baptist church had a very able, gifted and entrepreneurial pastor, Vyacheslav Khoroshenko, a bi-vocational minister who had created a business near to the church, a very impressive and well-run sausage factory! Pat agreed to work with the Rivne



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Baptists in this exciting venture and promised funds to enable the property to be purchased and construction of a camp center and the remodeling of the Baptist church sanctuary. Pat was asked why he believed that this particular project was the one in which he and Melinda were prepared to make a substantial capital investment responded simply, in words Pat would not use glibly or often "I believe the Lord was telling me to do this."

It was a courageous decision to proceed with the Liya Christian Camp for it would need a lot of money, voluntary labor and meticulous planning to ensure a viable operation. It was an inspired decision to name the camp after Liya. Indeed, once that decision was taken, there could be no other. It was a perfect choice. Liya epitomized in her brief life all that is best in a young person. Her Christian character and faith underlined the fact that the reason for the venture was to introduce young people to the Christian gospel and to serve their needs in the name of Christ. Her childhood reminded us that the camp is essentially for children. Liya's Ukrainian family background made the choice particularly appropriate and the fact that she lived in the United States served as a bridge and a reminder that the venture is a partnership between committed Christian people from two great nations. It is so refreshing to have an important center named, not after a politician, church dignitary or other high profile individual, but after a young, relatively unknown schoolgirl with family links in four different countries.

I have visited the Liya Christian Ministry Center on two occasions with Pat Horner, and a number of African American pastors and others, on a BWA delegation visit in Ukraine in October 1999, and with a good delegation of friends from the McLean Baptist Church in July 2000 at the opening ceremonies. In my diary entry on that first visit I recorded:

We drove to Malevo where the children's camp and conference center is being built to honor the memory of Liya Dovgalyuk.... As we neared the property and saw the extent of the progress since the decision to proceed, Pat could only repeat over and over, "incredible, incredible." We all sensed that the project, when completed, would be a jewel in the crown of Ukrainian Baptists. It was going to be state of the art.

Eight months later, the facility was ready to open. Margaret and I, with the McLean Baptist pastor, Michael Catlett, and a number of church members, were honored guests along with a Vice-President of the Baptist Union of Ukraine, Vitaly Tkarchuk. We were privileged to share in the ceremonies to celebrate this unique event. Notable attendees were members of the Dovgalyuk and the Horner families, key to the whole proceedings and intimately associated with the young girl after whom the complex was named. I wore two hats at the ceremonies, an officer of the BWA and a member of the McLean Baptist Church.

When our chartered bus arrived at Malevo on a very cold Saturday in June 2000, we were fascinated to see crowds of people awaiting us, a most impressive complex of buildings and a statue of Liya Dovgalyuk. Perhaps the statue does not altogether do Liya justice. Maybe it is not a Rodin or Michelangelo. But it is Liya. It depicts a young, innocent and uninhibited girl whose image is a moving reminder that the courage and faith of one young child is worthy of recall. It is testimony to the enduring legacy of a beautiful young person, Liya, who does not deserve to be—and will not be forgotten! Every



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year up to 1000 young people attend and hear Liya's story at the Liya Christian Ministry Center as part of the camp experience. So, every year, Liya's life and story is told to a new set of Ukrainian children. Truly, "she, though dead, yet speaks" (Hebrews 11:4).

The opening of the Center was truly memorable. Church leaders, political figures, Christian believers from nearby churches and overseas visitors gathered for a great outdoor celebration. The day was cold, windy and overcast but the spontaneous joy was evident. The many speeches—thanking God, the benefactors, the volunteers and all who contributed in any way—were appropriate. All agreed that no better facility of its kind existed throughout Ukraine. The music was inspiring, a ribbon was cut and an inspection made of the children in their new facility. I could not help but wonder if, as one of the "great crowd of witnesses," Liya was not somewhat bemused, perhaps even amused, to see such a ceremony being held in her name!

The following morning, a beautiful service of baptism took place in the man-made lake that is the swimming pool for the camp. What an experience and what a testimony to the power of the Christian message to the community, many members from which observed the new Christians joyfully witnessing to their faith in Jesus Christ. It was a good reminder of the essential purpose of the Liya Children's Camp and the identification of the local Baptist church with the venture. It was Pastor Khoroshenko, from Malevo, who presided and who invited Vitaly Tkarchuk, Michael Catlett and me to join him in conducting the baptisms of the 20 new believers—in a freezing cold lake!

The Liya Christian Ministry Center continues to exert an influence and to offer incredible opportunities for Ukrainian boys and girls to have two weeks of Christian camp experience with totally dedicated leaders in a superb environment and with outstanding facilities. Earlier I wrote wondering if Liya, in observing all this might be "bemused, perhaps even amused." One thing is certain, she, with that "great cloud of witnesses," would certainly be extremely happy to see the progress and ministry among children the Liya's Children's Camp is providing.

When Pastor Khoroshenko from Malevo, site of the Liya's Children's Camp, visited the offices of the BWA, he presented to the General Secretary a framed picture, prepared with great creativity in the amber stone which is so prevalent in Ukraine and in Latvia. The picture depicts the buildings named after Liya Dovgalyuk. That beautiful picture hangs prominently in the office of the BWA General Secretary and is captioned, "Liya's Children's Camp."

Not only through images like that, and not only through many portraits of Liya playing the violin or posing with her brothers, but in the hearts of countless people, truly, Liya's heritage and influence live on.