

May – June 2006

The Diary of a Sawmill and Hope

Starting a sawmill in the Russian forest has been quite an undertaking for William, Anatoli, and the Russian men desperate for a job. Follow along step-by-step as God's gift turns into a reality.

“About the sawmill, Anatoli sends his greatest thanks possible. But let me share what this is all about. There are two small stores here in Don. These two stores support about six people with a very small income. Other than the school, the small administration, the local doctor, a small boiler department, and the kindergarden, there are no jobs to be had. I can count only nine men that have jobs and then it's a very, very low wage. The saw mill we are trying to start has the potential to put to work almost every man. Anatoli has already picked several men to start working with him, one of them he feels will soon repent and he shares the Gospel with him often.

“Some men came from the forest department and went with Anatoli to see which trees he intended to cut and how many he could cut. Afterwards they said to him, “Well, as you know the custom, after we agree with everything you must buy the alcohol to seal the deal.”

“Sorry,” Anatoli replied, “I can't do this. I am a Christian. I don't drink and you all were paid to do this job. I won't buy alcohol for anyone.”

“OK,” they said. “But you will have to come to us again sometime.” Anatoli later told us, “They don't bother me. God is on our side.”

This is just one example of the things one must face trying to work here. They don't call this place “The Pit” for nothing.”

“Anatoli has been working on all the documents for the saw mill. You would not believe what one must go through to start a small business. He said, if all goes well, he will cut the first tree this Wednesday. And time and time again he tells me to thank everyone who is making this possible. I can see God's hand in this already. New people are coming to our church service and a sense of pride has started. For a man not to work strips him from being the bread winner and makes him a burden to his family. This has given some hope and others a glimpse of hope. No words do we have to thank all of you making this possible.”

“Please pray for Anatoli. They have come up with all kinds of paper work. He has been to Ust-Kulom everyday getting permits. They say, well, you did this wrong, you did that wrong, etc. Thank God he still says, “God will be under us and we will have a saw mill.” We talked today about how this is from God and anything from God will be under some type of attack. We need more prayers for him so we can start the timber work. He has been told by soooooo many locals, “When you get this running we would like a job – we will stop smoking and drinking.”

“Anatoli and a few men have worked in the forest – again Praise God! He finally has got enough documents to cut some trees. What a nightmare but he knows God is with him and God will win. We still have over three feet of snow but it has been melting on some days for little while making the roads a nightmare and almost unable to travel as the snow rut gets very deep. The forest road he must go through is only possible with horse or dozer. We made him a log sled to pull the logs from the forest to the edge of the road so when it dries up they can load on a truck. This is extremely hard work for him, but they are strong and hard work has been their life.”

“Anatoli came and needed a ride to Ust-Kulom to get more permissions to cut more trees. It works this way: You get permission along with payment according to the amount of trees you think you can cut and clean up the area in a certain time frame. If you don't do this work in this time then a fine is added...enough that you don't wish to let it happen and then face going through everything again.” (A footnote – It took Anatoli 20 trips to Ust-Kulom to get permission to cut this section of logs. It took two months but he said, “God will make it happen.” And he did.)

“Went to the forest with Anatoli to get pictures of him cutting trees for the saw mill and helped load 3 large wagon loads of fire wood. I was so thanking God when I saw their work site. Anatoli has 5 men working with him and four horses to pull two homemade log carts which we welded up for them. They have no money for a tractor or small dozer- the cost of a used dozer is \$6000. They must use their horses until our Lord blesses. These men, except Anatoli who has been cured by Jesus of his alcohol problem, are for the most part alcoholics. Remember they can't find work as there is none here. Most have lost the will to even go on, so alcohol has filled their empty lives. Today I saw six men with new hope. Anatoli told them that if they drink or come to work drunk, they're out of work. They agreed. Now get this, they all are working without pay for at least 6 months. They must first get the logs ready, deliver them to the saw mill site, then level the ground area, put in electric poles, build the saw mill house, put in electricity, dig the foundation for the saw machine by hand and then pour cement. Then they can start cutting the logs and selling the boards they cut. They may work the first year without pay and they know this. But they now have hope to be able to be the leader in their home...to at least “bring home the bacon” as we would say...to lead their home as God has designed. These people have been without work for many years now. Again it's touched my heart to see hope in their faces. Anatoli, who has more than hope – a promise from God, eternal life – also dreams of cutting logs to build a church...one big enough for more people to come and to know Jesus as his whole family does. A great dream! No words can thank you enough for this light, this hope.”

Other Outreach Projects

Doing their best to reach most of the 67 remote settlements and villages in Ust-Kulom district for Christ, here is a small picture of what work and sharing of the Gospel has been done..

- We spent over a month in a small settlement called Budyoursk. When we returned recently we discovered some have made a decision to receive Jesus. Last year, they knew not Christ. This visit they sang to us Christian songs. Our work projects are now bearing fruit in different settlements. Praise God! Gave Bibles and Christian literature to all who wanted.
- Shared and played Christian songs in 7 different settlements. The director is asking for more Christian literature.
- In Shereog, a 40 minute drive from Don...a very severe alcoholic wanted a new life. We sent him to a Christian rehab center. He has been free now 4 months and spends a lot of time in God's Word.
- Also in Shereog...at the culture club a full house attended as we shared and sang Christian songs. We put the floor in this culture club some time ago and the director asks us to continue to come and share Jesus.
- We have spoken to an English class in Ust-Kulom many times and always shared our faith in Jesus. Andrey and Simeon have played Christian songs.
- In Vogina the director asked for more Christian literature and Bibles.
- In Teamsher...worked on the local school's cafeteria. We put in wall panels, plus a new floor. We had to take up different sections of floor and put a foundation under the floor beams, then a full layer of boards.. Later, the kitchen staff painted the floor. After working all day we played Christian music and shared nightly. We also showed Christian videos. Some of the teaching staff took videos home. One lady took 3 to 4 almost every day. A ton of "seeds" being planted!

Other updates:

- Simeon has been sent to an electricity "school" as so many of our projects require a special certificate to complete.
- Andrey continues to lead our church in Don. The American that we had thought would come to lead the church in Don has made other plans. God is telling me it's time to move on forward. Andrey will stay on here at Don as I, Simeon, and a new translator which I do not have yet (need more prayers!) move on. It's my calling and besides, we don't need two here who can do the same thing. Andrey is now able to run things on his own and has for the most part as I'm gone a lot. Today we laid hands on him and prayed for him as the church's pastor. Everyone here today agreed 100% to have Andrey lead them. They also have plans to have elders and hopefully one day they can build a church. Anatoli says when God blesses the saw machine, they will provide the logs to do it.
- We had 50 at our Russian Easter service! Wow! Praise God! We had a full 2 hour service, followed by a long hour and a half fellowship. Many are now bringing food items to share as well. So great to see this growth in their lives.
- Our precious God, our precious Saviour has blessed me with yet another special answer to our prayers and now I deeply thank Him first and then personally each and every one of you who was praying for me. As you know the test results the doctors told in Sectifkar said I had some blockage to my brain and this was what caused these mini-strokes and I sincerely thought this was so. Then Dr. Bill Becknell, being worried about me wrote and invited me to Moscow to look things

over. He determined I had an inner ear virus that made me lose control of my balance, making the room appear to be spinning and causing sickness afterward. I was so thankful to God for nothing serious. This problem with the ear may go away or it might be possible to have this one ear drum removed which would cause me to lose hearing on one side. However, I believe our Lord has taken care of everything as I have not had them since. Once again I deeply thank all for their prayers and for sending Dr. Bill to my aid with his special skills. These old bones of mine though, are letting me know I'm no spring chicken!

- My special prayer requests: 1. That our mission team stays glued to Jesus not the work. 2. That we stay glued together as a team. 3. I need the full presence of the Holy Spirit – nothing happens without. 4. God's leading and very, very soon as to where to go. I have ideas, but want His will.