

At the same time, the director of the village school together with Viktor has begun an agricultural project to occupy the people of the village on one hand, and to support the poor children and the holocaust survivors on the other hand with the produce. As a church, we can finance the seeds and so be of a little assistance.

We very much hope that this place of hopelessness will become—like its namesake—a place of grace.

Events are moving dynamically forward. We do not know now what the future will bring. It began with a insignificant family story, but through God's wonderful guidance it led to reconciliation with the past and the beginning of something new and wonderful. Full of joy and expectation, we go on step by step into the "promised land".

Wiener Neustadt, Summer 2002

again brought two people together from each family in order to write a new chapter in the family history. Both of them have a calling to serve the Lord and the future will show in what way God will use them.

A meeting place in the village

God has laid another project on Maria and Viktor's hearts in addition to their work caring for the holocaust survivors. It has to do with their own village, Blagodatnoe, where there is no communal life, no community center, and no street lighting. If the moon does not shine, it is completely dark and only the glow of cigarettes or the sound of voices betrays the presence of others. Hardly any work has been available since the end of collective farming and a sense of hopelessness lies over the village. As a result, alcoholism is a problem and children are left to themselves. They have little to eat; but most troubling, they have no hope for the future. Because Maria and Viktor are both teachers they are concerned for the children in the village. Although the children have homes, because of the alcoholism of their parents many of them live on the streets.

Katja, the daughter of Viktor and Maria, is particularly concerned for these little ones. She gathers them, plays and sings with them, and tells them about Jesus in whom all hope and salvation is to be found. So it became a deep concern of their hearts to establish a youth centre in Blagodatnoe for the children of the area as a place of hope and for making contacts.

This project has already begun. Space is available and the opening celebration has been held. Because God has also laid this project on the hearts of our church members, we have begun to financially support this youth center and the work which is taking place there.

Preface:

This story by my wife, Uli, is a moving testimony of the grace of God. First of all, it is the story of a family, beginning with Uli's desire to trace relatives in Ukraine. But soon it moves beyond personal significance for a single family and blossoms into an exciting ministry in Ukraine.

The thread drawn through the whole story is the experience of prophetic guidance. Here you will read how step by step through supernatural revelation the story unfolded. The lines of blessings and curses in family history are touched on because God has given revelation concerning them and directed appropriate action through which blessings could flow.

It is an intensely personal story which may serve as a testimony to encourage and motivate the reader to recognize and allow God to work in other completely different family histories.

Above all, this story is a fresh testimony of how God speaks today, revealing his intentions and plans and bringing them to fruition. May this short story be a personal encouragement to many to take God's prophetic speech seriously and to search for and win God's perspective in their own families.

Helmuth Eiwen

Yearning to find my roots

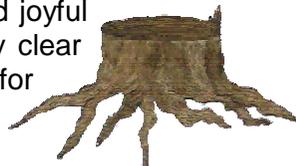
It all began one day when I saw a report on television about Ukraine. The tremendous poverty, the desperate despair and hopelessness of the people in this country moved me deeply. In particular, I remember one poorly-clad old lady who was trying to sell a pair of shoes in the marketplace in the bitter cold. She was shivering; obviously, she could have used those shoes herself.

Suddenly, the thought came to me that I might have relatives there and that they could be in similar need. My maternal grandfather was born and raised in Ukraine about 100 years ago. All that I knew about him was his name, his place of birth, and a few things that were written about him on a slip of paper. I had no idea at that time that this small piece of paper would come to mean so much to me.

The thought of possible relatives in Ukraine would not leave me. Perhaps my grandfather had siblings or children. How could I find them? Would it be an impossible task? I prayed, saying, "Lord, if this desire comes from you, please prepare a way."

In spring, 1996, I told Helmut, my husband, about my thoughts during a long car drive. Shortly afterwards, we drove to Hungary to visit our spiritual parents, Pastor Imre and Eva Szabo, in Sarbogard. After prayer together, Imre said that God had given him a vision for me. Immediately, his words had my undivided attention, because I had often experienced God speaking to me in this way.

God had shown Imre that I had Jewish roots in what had been the Soviet Union. Naturally, I was thrilled and joyful to hear this. From now on, it was absolutely clear that with God's help I must find a way to look for my relatives and research my family history. Through all that followed I became aware that God sees us not only as individuals, but always in connection with family history stretching back generations. The



A group from the Ichthys church visits Odessa

In the summer of 2001, thirty five people, including 15 young people, went from our church by bus to Odessa, traveling for 38 hours. Our aim was to renovate four homes belonging to poor Jewish people. In temperatures of 104 degrees we papered and painted walls, glued on tiles, repaired gas and electric appliances, upholstered furniture, repaired windows, and re-laid floors.

Most rewarding were the warm friendships that developed during our stay. Some of the youth said later that the time in Odessa was their best holiday experience. The journey was especially important for our daughter, Brigitte, who came with us not knowing how the trip would alter her life.

Because of the young people coming from our church we had decided to invite Vitaly, the young man we had met on our first visit to Ukraine, the grandson of my mother's half-brother. He was pleased to accept the invitation and came to Odessa from Kiev. He was soon integrated among the young people, helping with the work we were doing. Because he also spoke good English he was also able to help with translation.

During that week, our daughter Brigitte and Vitaly fell in love. It was mainly through music that they found each other, since both are musicians and both see part of their calling in this area. Soon a special friendship developed out of this first meeting—a friendship which led to marriage.

We felt from the beginning that this friendship was not a matter of chance, but that God had laid his hand on them in order to further his plans. We see in this relationship an outward visible sign of reconciliation within my family—like the completion of a circle. Eighty years ago, my grandfather abandoned my grandmother because he had to return to Ukraine, and no one ever heard from him again. With Brigitte and Vitaly, God has

Helmuth and I have had the opportunity to visit those Jewish people who are cared for by Viktor and Maria and to spend a blessed time with them. Although we live so far away, there is already a warm relationship between us. We feel God's love for these badly hurt people. Always, we have the desire to hold them in our arms, to love them, and to express kindness to them.

God heals wounded Jewish hearts

One time, when we visited a service in the messianic church in Odessa, David Schneier, the pastor, introduced us and asked us to say a few words of greeting.

After the service, a young woman came to us with tears in her eyes and told us the following story.

When German soldiers came to Ukraine in World War II, her mother, together with many other people including Jews and other Ukrainians, was deported to Germany and then to Austria. She suffered indescribable distress at the concentration camp in Mauthausen.

Miraculously, she managed to escape together with some others. She reached the vicinity of Graz and was taken in by a Christian family. This family were practising Christians and lived according to their faith. Through their loving example, she was reconciled to God and mankind. When she returned to the Ukraine she enjoyed an inner peace in spite of the traumatic experiences.

She had one great, final wish at the end of her life, which she expressed to her daughter before she died. "Please tell the first Austrians you meet that I have forgiven all the Austrians who hurt and humiliated me!" It was an incredible message and we could hardly believe what we heard. We were deeply touched and filled with joy and gratitude.

Bible also confirms how important family trees are in the eyes of God. No one drops from heaven on their own, but each person is a link in a long family history. God has not forgotten our ancestors and he knows every one of our descendants before they are born. I am sure that every prayer that we pray for our descendants, whether they are already born or not yet born, will be heard and answered by God.

My Grandparents

Unfortunately, I did not have the privilege of knowing my grandparents personally. My grandmother, Margarethe Dreischke, lived near Leipzig at the end of World War I. Widowed, with two small children, she was employed as a maid on an estate belonging to a nobleman. There she met a Ukrainian prisoner of war, Iwan Rasbitzky, who came daily with others to work on the estate. Iwan was from Dashinka, a small village near Shitomir in northern Ukraine. At that time, many people in Europe were starving. Somehow, Iwan managed to supply my grandmother and her two young children with food. They fell in love and my grandmother became pregnant.

On June 4, 1920, my mother, Elisabeth, was born. Only six months later, at the beginning of 1921, all Russian prisoners of war in Germany were sent home. Iwan Rasbitzky, my mother's natural father, also returned to Ukraine and my grandmother never heard from him again. Now she was left alone with three small children. The owners of the estate wanted to adopt Elisabeth, but my grandmother did not accept the offer and shortly afterwards moved to Neckarbischofsheim in Würtemberg.

Soon after, she married a man there. It was very difficult for my mother to grow up as an illegitimate child and also to be frequently mocked as a "Russian child." Even her stepfather ridiculed her with this name.

A red circle on the map

Except for once during World War II, my mother never spoke with her mother about her father. At that time, she had to state the name of her father in her Arian pass and find out if he was Jewish or Arian. She wrote to the war archives in Berlin requesting her father's documents.

In answer, she received a paper on which his personal data was recorded. Because his faith was declared as Roman Catholic, she survived these times without difficulty. Now she had in her possession a document which many years later would gain added significance.

After the early death of her mother, my mother married an Austrian soldier who was stationed in Germany. Sometime after her marriage to Rudolf Meixner in 1943, my mother moved to his native town of Bruck an der Mur in Styria.

I was born there in January, 1945, and I spent the years of my childhood and youth in this lovely little town. My father, who became an American prisoner of war, came home in October, 1945. As I had not been able to know my grandmother due to her early death in Germany, I did not miss my grandfather for a long time.

However, one day I asked my mother about her father. I remember how hesitatingly and reluctantly she answered me. The pain that her father had abandoned her and that she had never heard from him again was too much.

So she spoke of him only sparingly and with restraint. However, in response to my question, she took an atlas and showed me the town of Shitomir in Ukraine. I made a ring round this town with a red pencil in the atlas. It was the only visible sign I had of my grandfather.



In this dream, Viktor was standing some distance from Odessa, looking at a road leading to the city. Suddenly, a car filled with people drove past on its way to Odessa. As he watched the car, he saw how a large black cloud spread over Odessa and began to move nearer.



The car seemed to be driving straight into the cloud. Viktor began to shout, "Stop! Stop!" But no one heard him. A moment later, the cloud moved a little to one side and a enormous column of fire stretching from heaven to earth stood in front of him. He could hear electricity crackling within the column. As he turned, he saw another gigantic column behind him. Overcome with awe, he looked to heaven and saw a figure with a long rod in his hand emerging from a white cloud. He looked into his eyes for a long time, and although Viktor was aware that he was still dreaming, he knew he was facing God.

Deeply moved, he awoke convinced that this signified a calling—an assignment from God for his life.

The two columns of fire remind us of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and because they stood exactly in a north-south direction, they could indicate that God might also want to use Viktor and Maria to help Jewish people return to Israel.

When Viktor told us about this dream we were filled with the fear of God. Before they returned home we prayed together and laid our hands on them to bless them for their ministry.

Since then, the ministry of Viktor and Maria has developed wonderfully. Deep and true friendships have grown between them and the Jewish people. God has also opened doors to Jewish organizations who trust them and give them addresses of poor Jewish people.

A ministry for holocaust survivors ensues

Soon, the thought came that we should ask Viktor and Maria if they could imagine a ministry with the holocaust survivors commissioned by and on behalf of our church. They lived in the vicinity and we thought they might have the time and opportunity to visit and care for holocaust survivors on certain days each week.

When we shared this with our church, the idea was welcomed. Having presented our thoughts to Maria and Viktor in a letter, we waited with anticipation for their answer. With great pleasure we read their reply in which they told us how God had filled them with joy, love, and excitement for such a ministry. They could be available three days a week, they said. Soon, they received the first addresses of holocaust survivors through various contacts, and so their ministry began. They usually reached the hearts of these people first of all by asking for forgiveness for the suffering which the Ukrainian people had caused.

Viktor and Maria quickly discovered how they could help people effectively by bringing food when necessary, buying medicines, taking them to the doctor, doing necessary errands for them, taking them out on little excursions, and spending a lot of time talking with them. The finances for this activity are carried by our church, and a used car, which is a necessity for such a ministry, has also been financed.

A dream which preoccupies Viktor

Some time later, when Maria and Viktor visited us again at the invitation of our church, Viktor could hardly wait to tell us a dream that God had given him a few days before.

Through the goodness of God a way to the Ukraine is prepared

During a church retreat I met a messianic Jewish family from Kiev who now lived in Hamburg. I told them about my family history and showed them the small document with the few details about my grandfather. Jakov promised to help me, if possible, through a friend in Kiev. So I gave him the document and my address.

With great anticipation I waited for an answer. But, when it finally arrived I was disappointed. Jakov wrote that his friend was not able to find out anything about my relatives. Now I had no idea how I could achieve my aim. Therefore, I laid the whole investigation back into God's hands.

The dream of the discarded tiles

One night, God gave me a significant dream in which I walked past a row of houses built in a terrace. Each house was a different colour. I felt drawn to each of the houses, and felt at home in each one. When I came to the last house, I saw that it terminated with a smooth wall and that it had no windows. Behind the house I saw a meadow.

As I looked more closely, I discovered tiles which had been discarded and lay scattered all over the ground. Curious, I hurried over to take a closer look. I was surprised to discover Jewish motives embossed onto the tiles. With excitement, I bent down to pick up one of the tiles. However, as I touched it, it fell to pieces in my hand. Quickly, I tried to put it together again on the ground. At this moment, my eyes fell on the end wall of the house and I was astonished to see that all the discarded tiles had come from the wall.

As I awoke, I understood immediately what God wanted to say to me. The row of houses to which I had felt drawn symbolised the numerous generations of my family in Ukraine. The tiles with the Jewish motives which were lying around showed without doubt that there were Jewish roots and Jewish heritage in the family, but that these had been thrown away either because they had not meant anything to the family or because they had wanted to conceal them. The broken tile in my hand indicated that I would not be able to prove the Jewish connection of the family.

This dream became very significant for me. I felt some of God's pain over the discarded tiles. I thanked God for the revelation about the Jewish heritage and for the confirmation of the prophesy he had given me in Hungary through Imre Szabo. With that, I considered the investigation finished.

God surprises us when we don't expect it

I will never forget December 17, 1996. I was just coming home when Helmuth, who was standing at the open kitchen window, called to me, "Uli, come in quickly; a miracle has happened!"

As I hurried into the kitchen Helmuth held out to me a letter addressed:



To Uli Eiwien
Granddaughter of Iwan
Rasbitzky

A third journey to Ukraine

In 1999, Helmuth and I traveled again to Ukraine, visiting for the second time a messianic Jewish community led by David and Leslye Schneier. They were in touch with holocaust survivors in the city, and they told us about them and their needs. When we returned home again, God began to speak very clearly to us about the holocaust survivors. Many of them receive no support because documents proving their imprisonment in a concentration camp are missing.

About 500 holocaust survivors live in Odessa alone. Because of the work of Viktor's son, Vladislav, in the archives in Odessa, we knew about their needs.

We began to pray and asked God if our church could help somehow. It was not the first time that that God had brought us into contact with holocaust survivors. Already many years before God had commanded us through prophetic guidance to invite the Jewish former residents of our town, Wiener Neustadt, to return for a "reunion week." They had survived the holocaust, and were now scattered throughout the whole world. We wanted to ask them face-to-face for forgiveness. More than 70 people from all over the world accepted the invitation for meetings spread over a total of four "reunion weeks."

Each time, we experienced reconciliation and healing. Many saw each other for the first time in 57 years. Those were exceptional and moving days for us all. The whole church was involved and God's love to his people flowed through our hearts. Our visitors also spoke as witnesses of the times in local schools and were received by city and state officials. We will never forget the Sabbath service we could celebrate with the first group—the first such service in Wiener Neustadt since 1938.

Could it be that this new adventure in Odessa also had something to do with the Jews? How could ministry take place over such a great distance? We implored God to speak.

I was made aware that God wanted to show me that in the fourth generation of my Ukrainian family there may have been a man with Jewish roots. This man had not only denied and relinquished these, but had even become anti-Semitic. (This old Jewish man could even represent various people of Jewish descent in the family history who had relinquished their Jewish heritage.) The big celebration that was being prepared symbolised the actual message of this dream. It points to a feast of reconciliation. **Something like a reconciliation with the Jewish heritage of the family is necessary** so that a door can be opened to allow a new flow of blessings into and out of the family.

We pray together for forgiveness

In the summer of 1998, we invited Viktor and Maria to visit us in Austria. For the first time, they set foot in a western country, which made many new impressions on them. The most important thing about this visit was the joy we shared and the many hours we spent in deep conversation with one another. We prayed, praised, and worshipped God and thanked him again and again that he had brought us together.

As part of a family which had relinquished its Jewish heritage and even adopted an anti-Semitic attitude, we soon had the impression that Maria and I, as descendants of the Rasbitzky family, should acknowledge the guilt of our forefathers. We felt it could be important for us and our descendants. We asked God for forgiveness, thanking him for our Jewish heritage, and accepting it in prayer as a conscious act. All that took place in faith only because we could not prove our Jewish ancestry. We put our lives again in his hands and put ourselves at his disposal for his future plans and purpose. It was not long before we could see the effect of this prayer. That year God began to draw our attention to the Jewish holocaust survivors in Odessa.

I simply could not believe it. This letter came from Ukraine! Quickly, I opened it to discovered a few pages written in Russian. My thoughts were racing. Had I really found my Ukrainian relatives? Did God intend to do something new?

I rushed as soon as I could to Galina, a young Russian woman who came occasionally to our church. She understood German well and so I asked her to translate the letter. I could not believe what she read to me. Even today I am astonished and in awe of God's ways when I think about it.

The letter was written by Viktor Charkovenko, who is married to Maria, whose maiden name is Rasbitzky. She comes from the Shitomir area and is indeed related to me. Viktor is a retired colonel in the Soviet army. He had studied history and some years ago had written a genealogy of the Rasbitsky family in a work of research contained in three books.

The family comes originally from Poland. It was an aristocratic family which received its coat of arms in 812. Viktor wrote that he and Maria live in a village called Blagodatnoe, which lies between Nikolajev and Odessa. The name of this village means grace, he said. Viktor worked as a history teacher in the village school and Maria as an English teacher. Maria was in the hospital undergoing an operation at the time the letter arrived. For this reason, we could communicate with Viktor only in Russian.

Viktor and Maria have two children. Their son, Vladislav, works in the state archives in Odessa, which are housed in a former synagogue. One of his tasks is to help Jewish people who cannot prove their Jewish identity. During times of persecution, many Jews had denied their Jewish descent and had destroyed their documents of identification. However, they now urgently needed these to emigrate or to obtain support as survivors of the holocaust. Vladislav's desk is the last place of hope for many old and poor Jews to receive documents concerning their Jewish identity or to find proof of imprisonment in a concentration camp for a certain period of time.

Vladek, as he is called by his family and friends, is married to Helena, who is a pretty and sensitive young woman. She works in a telephone business. They have a lovely little daughter called Oxana.

Viktor and Maria's daughter, Kathrin (Kathja), and also lives in Blagoatnoe. She is the mother of little Dimitri, who is called Dimi for short. Kathja is studying English and eventually, like her mother, would like to teach.

Only a few decisive minutes

After Viktor had introduced himself in his letter, he reported about the things which were so much on my heart. How did he find my address? I could not imagine how, but as Galina continued to read I was overwhelmed by God's wisdom and kindness.

It happened as follows. That summer Viktor and Maria had spent their holidays as they did every year with relatives in a small village near Shitomir. A friend of Viktor's at home had taken advantage of his trip to ask him to go to the city archives in Shitomir and bring back a certain document.

Shortly before his return home, Viktor hurried to the archives in order to carry out his friend's request. He obtained the document, thanked the librarian, paid for it, and ran down the stairs. He already had the door handle in his hand when he heard a woman's voice loudly calling his name. Surprised, he stopped and turned round to see a secretary running after him.

She asked if he was the same person who had written a genealogy about the Rasbitzky family some years before and had spent many hours working in the archives. Astonished that the observant secretary had recognised him after such a long

folding door leading into a fourth room. The woman said to me, "The king lives in the next room." She opened the door and I saw an old man approaching us.

Immediately, I recognised that he was Jewish, which delighted me. When he stood before me, I looked into his sad eyes. In fact, everything about him seemed sad. He was dressed in grey and had grey hair. Then I saw something extremely important, but rather peculiar. He was wearing a golden chain with a large medallion around his neck. Then, as the medallion grew in size before my very eyes I recognised a swastika on it.



Next, he invited me into his room, in the middle of which stood a grand piano. Otherwise, I could not distinguish any other furniture, and on the whole, the room appeared sad and lonely. Even so, I sensed how everyone was waiting with anticipation for the celebration that was being prepared. It was going to be quite exceptional.

After I awoke, I realised warm feelings had accompanied me during the entire dream. It was only months later that I understood how I should interpret this dream. The new house symbolised everything new that God wanted to familiarize us with in Ukraine. The magnificent house represented the family of my Ukrainian relatives, an aristocratic family that is now completely needy.

The woman who led me through the rooms was a picture of the Holy Spirit who wanted to make me aware of something particularly important in the family history.

The three rooms signify the last three generations. God's spirit led me back to the fourth generation, an ancestor who was symbolised in the dream as an old Jewish man wearing a medallion around his neck with a swastika on it.

The dream of the medallion

At the end of 1997, God gave me an intriguing dream that I could not understand for a long time. Only many months later did God clearly reveal the meaning of the dream to me. Through it, I gained more insight into my family history.

I now understand that God sees us not only as individuals, but that he views the generations of our family as links in a chain. There is a family blessing and a family curse. The curse is carried down to the third and fourth generation, but the blessing to thousands (Exodus 34: 7-8). Sometimes, God reveals things about our families that we cannot naturally know, but that for certain reasons are important for us to know.

In this dream, God took me back four generations in my Ukrainian family to show me something important. In the dream I saw the following:

We had just moved into a house in a large woods. Opposite our home, in the middle of a large estate, stood a magnificent house. However, the rear of the house was dilapidated. As I was leaving my house, I saw a young man coming out of the neighbouring house. He told me that today his father was celebrating a big festival. He mentioned the name of this festival, but unfortunately, I could understand him. I asked him many times, but I simply could not understand him.

As I started back to our house, I met a woman from the same neighbouring house and she invited me to look round her house with her. As we entered through the dilapidated back entrance, she mentioned that the main entrances were to be found on the other side of the house. I looked around the corner and saw three large, imposing entrances at the foot of a hill. A large car was standing in front of them. The woman now led me through three adjoining rooms. Each room was decorated with beautiful cedar—floors, walls and ceiling. However, all these rooms were completely empty. Having arrived in the third room, I saw a

time, Viktor confirmed that he was. Handing him a piece of paper, she said, "This was sent to the archives. Perhaps you can do something with it?" It was that small sheet on which the details about my Ukrainian grandfather and my address were written.

To this day, I do not know how this piece of paper came to be in the archives. Probably Jakov's friend had arranged it. Some months after the original inquiry, we had received an official letter from the archives in Shitomir stating that no information about the Rasbitzky family could be found.

I probably would never have found out about my relatives had it not been for this short "chance" meeting. Only a matter of seconds decided whether we Rasbitzkys would find one another. For me, one thing was clear. This was one of God's arranged meetings, a God-given moment in time, apparently insignificant, but out of which something momentous and wonderful would emerge. Even today, I am filled with wonder and gratitude when I think about it.

Viktor's letter reached me shortly before Christmas, but I waited until Christmas Eve to show it to my mother. She could hardly believe that at the age of nearly 80 she would be reconciled to her past. The Ukrainian letter was her loveliest Christmas present.

A lively correspondence begins

After Maria recovered with the help of God, we could correspond in English. We wrote about our families, the children, the in-laws and the grandchildren, and also the work in the church. So we came to know and love one another. Even in the first letters, we recognised Maria and Viktor's sincerity, depth of thought, and relationship to God. It was soon apparent that they loved God and that their hearts were open to those in need.

A fast train to Odessa

At the end of August, 1997, our church held a week-long Bible school on the topic of prophesy. We invited our friends, Jim and Michal Ann Goll, from Nashville in the USA, as guest speakers. They have a distinctive prophetic gift, and they taught us about this theme during the week.

Afterwards, I asked them to pray for me. I had no idea how important this prayer would be for Helmuth and me.

During the prayer, Jim began to prophesy, saying,

“You are investigating your family history. Through this experience, you will come into contact with the blessing of your ancestors. As the eldest daughter you have received the inheritance. May the blessing of Abraham be upon you. May your seed multiply the blessing of Abraham in your family.”

Then, he suddenly said, *“I see a heavenly meeting place in Odessa and a fast train to Odessa, the next step in a new Jewish adventure associated with care, protection, and refuge for Jews in a time of need and oppression. I am sending you on your way! The next stage is beginning.”*



Immediately, I felt the seriousness of these words. The next morning as we were having our breakfast, I heard our fax machine rattling away. We were very much surprised to find that the fax was from Odessa—an invitation from Maria and Viktor for us to visit them.

We had never heard from them in this way before because they had limited access to technical equipment. On account of the prophesy of the previous evening we felt that this was God really speaking and also his timing.

He is the nearest relative I have met up to now and he was able to give me first-hand information about my grandfather.

When my grandfather returned from captivity in Germany, he was able to live a normal life with his family for only a short time. He was already married in 1913 before he was taken prisoner. He and his wife, Antonia, had a son named Boleslav.

His second son, Vladislav, who we were just visiting, was born in 1922. At that time, my grandfather was a wealthy property owner. However, like many others, in 1930 all his land was taken from him because he refused to allow it to become part of a collective farm. He was taken to Murmansk, from which he returned ill and weak two years later. He died in poverty in 1933.

Vladislav's family prepared a small feast for us. The table was richly laid and we sang happily together. I was a little sad that my mother could not be with us. We were just about to leave when a young man came running across the grass. Shyly, he greeted us, introducing himself as Vitaly, the grandson of my mother's stepbrother.

Immediately, he asked Helmuth if he was a pastor as Vitaly's mother had whispered to him shortly before. When Helmuth confirmed this, a smile spread across his face. Vitaly told us that he was a committed Christian and belonged to a church in Kiev. We opened our hearts to him, and we invited him to accompany us during the following days.

There was something special about him. At that time we had no idea that this meeting with Vitaly would acquire even more importance for our own family.

After 10 days, during which time I had not only met my mother's half-brother and his grandson, but other relatives as well, the time came for us to return home. Our departure was difficult; part of us still remains in Ukraine.

Uncle Boleslav and his wife Stanislava presented us with bread and salt again before we entered their house. Afterwards, they led us into the living room. Here, uncle Boleslav ceremoniously handed me the family coat of arms as a sign that from now on I would be a member of the Rasbitzky family. Although this was only a symbolic act I felt very honoured and accepted.

During the following days we visited relatives in various places. There was much amazement and joy as everywhere we told how we had found one another. Many of the relatives came to know each other for the first time. We also spoke often about the Jewish roots in the family. Although the Rasbitzkys belong to the Roman Catholic church, there are various signs indicating Jewish ancestors.

On one occasion, we visited the Jewish cemetery at Shitomir. Because this is a town with a large Jewish population there is an old Jewish cemetery. As we were prayerfully looking at the graves an old Jewish lady came up to us. After we exchanged a few friendly words with one another she suddenly began to bless us. We felt the presence of God as she wished us God's blessing, protection, health, joy, peace, and provision.

My mother's half-brother

A year later, Helmuth and I drove to Ukraine in a minibus in order to be more flexible and also to be able to visit more relatives.

One day, we drove to the small village where the half-brother of my mother lives. The road was in a terrible condition; we would have preferred to have carried the vehicle over the bumps and holes! Finally, we reached the village of Nepoznaici where Vladislav Rasbitzky lived with his family in a tiny house.

So we decided very quickly to make preparations for the journey, and 10 days later we were sitting in the airplane on our way to Odessa. The prophesy had been so quickly fulfilled. Only the means of transport had been replaced by a faster one.

The new Jewish adventure begins

In Odessa, Viktor and Maria greeted us with an enormous bouquet of flowers. Instantly, we were in each others' arms and did not let go of one other for a long time. It was as if we had always known one other.

Maria and Viktor had hired a large car with a driver and we drove along rough roads to a forlorn little town in the middle of a broad plains, Blagodotnoe, the little village named "grace." The community of 300 inhabitants consisted of four parallel roads. The nearest town, Ocakov, lay about 12 miles away. At the end of our dusty, 90-minute drive we stopped before a small, but well-cared-for house, Maria and Viktor's home.

We were warmly greeted by their daughter Kathja and her family, who had carefully prepared for our arrival. Flowers decorated the table and they presented us with the customary welcoming loaf of bread and salt, wrapped in a cloth of Ukrainian embroidery. Afterwards, we ate a delicious traditional Ukrainian dish of borsch.

Then came the moment when Viktor brought out the three large books in which he had written the history of the Rasbitzky family. There was one question I was dying to ask. "Are there Jewish roots in the family?"

It was as God had shown me in the dream with the broken tiles. Although there were some possibilities of Jewish connections, there was no proof.

Jews and Christians belong together



During the times that we were together we explained the biblical connections of Jews and Christians to Maria and Viktor, as we did to all the relatives we met.

We showed them many places in the Bible where it says that God created a people who would be his witness in the world. Whoever wants to know who the one and only true God of this world and universe is must look through the window that is Israel. Everything we know about God, his character, his love for human beings, his plan for salvation, and the future, we experience through the Jewish people.

It was they to whom God first revealed himself and who experienced his holiness and love. God spoke to them first and gave them the ten commandments as direction for their lives. It was they who faithfully and devotedly wrote down everything for the generations to come. From them the Saviour was born who took all the sins of the world on himself.

Of his own free will he offered himself as a sacrifice for mankind. It is through his blood that all are saved, whether Jew or gentile, if they believe on him. Israel's history records how God freed them from slavery through the sacrifice of a lamb whose blood was to be applied to the doorposts of their houses. All who did this were saved from the angel of death.

Jesus said that he first came to the children of Israel. This is described in Mathew 15:24. In Hebrews 10:14 we read, "By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." (NIV) As the sacrificial lamb for both Jews and Gentiles, Jesus destroyed the barrier that stood between them (Ephesians 2:14).

All who come from the nations and are grafted onto this olive tree receive the sap from its roots (Romans 11:17).

As we spoke about this theme to Maria and Viktor, we noticed how God's spirit opened their eyes to the truth. They asked a lot of questions and it soon became apparent that they were beginning to love the Jews and also to question their own family history.

Return home to Shitomir, the town circled in red

After staying a few days in Blagodatnoe, we traveled about 310 miles by train to Shitomir, the hometown of my grandfather, where many of my relatives still live today.

Uncle Boleslav and his wife, Stanislava, live in Novi Savod, a small village near Shitomir. He is Maria's favourite uncle and my mother's cousin. Aunt Stanislava's son, Anatoly Rasbitzky, is a recognised artist in Ukraine, where his paintings are exhibited in museums.

I will never forget our first meeting. As we were driving from Shitomir to Novi Savod in a rented car along a road that could be compared to a washboard, my heart was beating with excitement. I felt this meeting was going to be very important for me.

Finally, we arrived. An old man in large boots was standing in front of the house. He held a large stick in his hand with which he was about to drive his only cow into the cow shed. Maria called to me joyfully and not without pride, "That is my uncle Boleslav!"

Immediately, I jumped out of the car and ran into his open arms. It is difficult to describe what I felt at that moment. I felt I had come home; like a small child who had finally found her way home after a long journey. Security was mixed with pleasure and gratitude over God's wonderful guidance.