

## Chapter 21

### Al Akimoff

#### Slavic Ministry with YWAM



**Al Akimoff** was born in Kuldja, China as the beginning of the wave of baby boomers burst onto the earth. His parents and grandparents had fled from the persecution and famines in Ukraine and after a long journey that took them through the Urals and Central Asia they escaped into China. They had become believers in a brief revival that swept through Ukraine in the late 1920s.

After some more years of traveling across China and living in refugee camps in Japan and Philippines, they arrived in the U.S. where Al grew up in a Slavic community in San Francisco.

Finding Jesus after a few rebellious years, Al was recruited by Loren Cunningham to join him in a summer outreach in the Caribbean Islands in 1964. It was a summer that changed his life. After graduation from Bible College, Al and several of his college mates traveled to Europe to attend Youth With a Mission's (YWAM) newly launched School of Evangelism.

In 1973 Al and Carolyn founded YWAM Slavic Ministries to initiate evangelism and discipleship in Eastern Europe. This year marks 40 years since they have ministered among the Slavic peoples of the world pioneering many ministries in the nations scattered across Eastern Europe.

<https://us2.campaign-archive.com/?u=c8e8cd3bf6c79b857f028d6bd&id=effe7d0ba2>

Newsletter from Al Akimoff (grandson of Gabriel Avramenko)

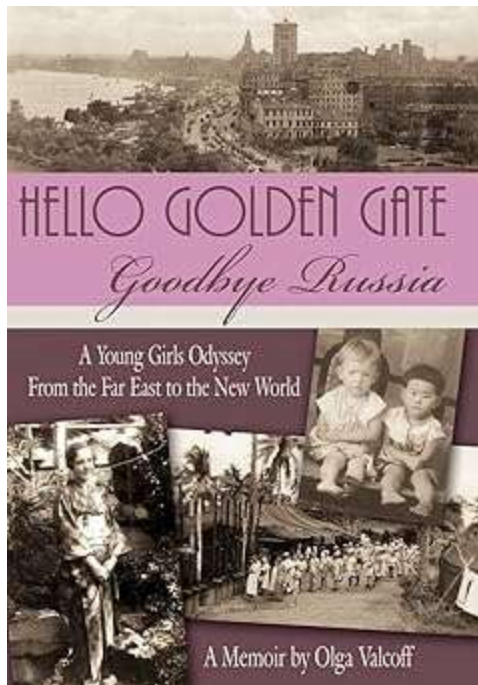


**I grew up on stories of how my parents escaped from Stalin's Ukraine and their 25-year journey across Russia and Central Asia over the mountains into China and a three-year trek across a war-ravaged China. I was three years old when we reached Shanghai. The city was eventually surrounded by Mao Tse Tung's army and there was a desperate struggle as thousands attempted to flee.**

**What I didn't know was that at this time Stalin had made an agreement with the nations involved in the war that all Russians were to be repatriated. If we did not escape from China we would be either killed because we were not communists or sent back to the Soviet Union.**

**There was a deluge of refugees pouring into America and other countries at the time. Shanghai was filled with thousands of Russians, and no one wanted us. The president of the Philippines finally agreed to take us. We were sent to a small Island called Tubabao. We lived there for two years and although I was between 3 and 5 years old, my earliest memories in life began here. Years later when I was helping to feed Cambodian refugees at a camp in Thailand, my memory went back to standing in a food line as a child to get a bowl of rice.**

I ran across a book recently by a woman who was also at that camp, it's called **"Goodbye Russia, hello Golden Gate"**. For the first time I learned of what was happening politically to us at this time. We were Russians, although many of us were Ukrainians, Armenians and others we were all lumped together under the one heading. In the minds of most people, that meant we were also Communists. We had escaped from the persecution of Stalin and then again the Communism of Mao and that didn't really matter, we were Russians and thus Communists. America didn't want us. Thankfully, through the prayers of many, the help of the church and other organizations in the U.S. we were ultimately picked up by a Navy transport ship and we sailed under the Golden Gate to a new life in America.



. . . the epic generational saga of a family that was forced to flee their mother country and spent the rest of their lives looking for a place to call home. When author Olga Valcoff's grandparents left behind everything they cared for while fleeing from the Russian Revolution of 1917, they became part of Asia's White Russian community, where a diaspora of stateless refugees found comfort as they tried to rebuild their lives. . . a factual record of Russian refugees in the Far East from the early 1920's through World War II and Chinese Communist take over of China. The book is dedicated "to all the Russian emigres who had to flee their homeland at the onset of Communism, for their indomitable spirit."

I was able to glean several interesting facts of interest to our historical perspective in this work: (1) the "Stateless Russians" living in China; (2) the conditions on Tubabao, Philippines. I'm putting several pages here that refer to that in the book that Al Akimoff found:

Harbin is the place where most of the Russian Old Believers settled; even though it is in different locations within the large country of China, the major similarity is



that both Evangelical and Old Believers groups were escaping communism and trying to find a land where they could practice their religion without persecution.

### *The Rise of Harbin and the Stateless Russians*



*Typical building in Harbin, China.*

By 1925, both sides of my family were safely in Harbin, Manchuria, a place where many refugees ended up during the turbulent years after their flight from Russia. Harbin was situated in an area of Manchuria that bordered Russia; culturally, it was somewhere in between—a blending of two ancient cultures that somehow managed to fit together.

Originally settled by Russian employees and builders of the Chinese Far East Railway in 1897, Harbin had grown from a sleepy fishing village into a large Russian city at the turn of the century. The railway connected China to the Russian Far East and was an offshoot of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the most reliable method of transportation at the time. Easily considered one of the industrial wonders of

the world, its almost 6,000-mile stretch is still the longest continuous railway on Earth.

By the turn of the century, 50,000 Russians had settled and built Harbin. From 1918 on, during the exodus from the revolution, the number had swelled to 200,000 because of refugees seeking to escape the impending clutches of Russian Communism. The Trans-Siberian brought all kinds of Russians to Harbin: military leaders and officers, soldiers from the White Army and members of the White government, business entrepreneurs, and other people from all walks of life.

During the time when my grandparents and parents came to live in Harbin, the city had wide, tree-lined boulevards, streetcars, elegant European-style buildings, and many lovely parks and Russian churches. In addition, there were department stores, markets teeming with vendors and shoppers, bustling shops and restaurants full of lively customers, and most importantly, educational establishments. It was not home, and it was not the life to which they were accustomed, but it was a decent place for Russian middle-class citizens to begin to rebuild their lives.

Although by that time, they were no longer *citizens*. The Russian tsarist government ceased to exist when the Communists won the revolution. All who supported Communism and remained in Russia became Soviet citizens. Anyone else was cast aside with no country and no rights. This was what happened to Harbin's refugees: no longer under the protection of Russia's government, but not claimed by China's, they became stateless, people without a country or citizenship. They were called "The White Russians," and

## *Hello, Tubabao*



*View of the Tubabao camp.*

The International Refugee Organization had secured us a space in a camp they were building on Tubabao, a small island in the Philippines. A group of White Russians had flown out there in December of 1948 to prepare the area for inhabitants, to rebuild whatever was left over from its former days as a U.S. military encampment during the war. They arrived expecting to see a fairly intact facility, but all they found instead were Quonset huts that had been torn down by storms and scavenged by natives who lived in other areas of the island. The IRO quickly sent an assortment of U.S. Army tents, stoves, cookware, and other supplies, and in addition, U.S. military food rations.

**Posted on Facebook by Al Akimoff:**

**Al Akimoff** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/344095249399156>

(Richmond District Memories and Beyond)

Through the 50s and 60s, you may have passed this scene on 4th Ave and Geary. A large crowd of people gathered in front of a storefront converted into a church. What most people did not know was the story of these people. Most of them left their country of Ukraine, some from Russia because of persecution, especially of the church at that time by Stalin. Millions were displaced as more millions were starved to death. This group of several hundred believers left Ukraine and travelled across the Soviet Union, Central Asia and over the mountains into China. I along with many of my friends who attended George Peabody, Roosevelt Jr. High and Washington High were born in China. We spent some years in a refugee camp in the Philippines. After a congressional bill was passed to allow us to come to the U.S., we were brought to San Francisco on a U.S. Navy Ship in 1951. You can imagine the joy on the faces of those people as they passed under the Golden Gate bridge having travelled on a journey of over 25 years. Most of us lived in the Avenues through the next decades. The church built their own building, moving to Potrero Hill in the late 60s. During those years, my friends and I probably sold you newspapers or delivered them to your homes. Our dads probably painted your houses, and our moms probably baked your bread and pastries and other goodies at bakeries and Dellies on Geary and Clement. We are scattered across America now and some of us are helping our relatives and friends in Ukraine today.

Al Akimoff: I lived on 9th Ave and was the grandson of the Pastor (Gabriel Avramenko) who led the group on their journey to America.

Comment: [Paul J. Wigowsky](#) (on Facebook)

This was the church I attended as a youngster (through teen years). Many memories, including attending Russian school classes upstairs (apartment rooms). I'm in the front row, beside Pastor Gabriel Avramenko (to his right).

<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/GearySt8.jpg>





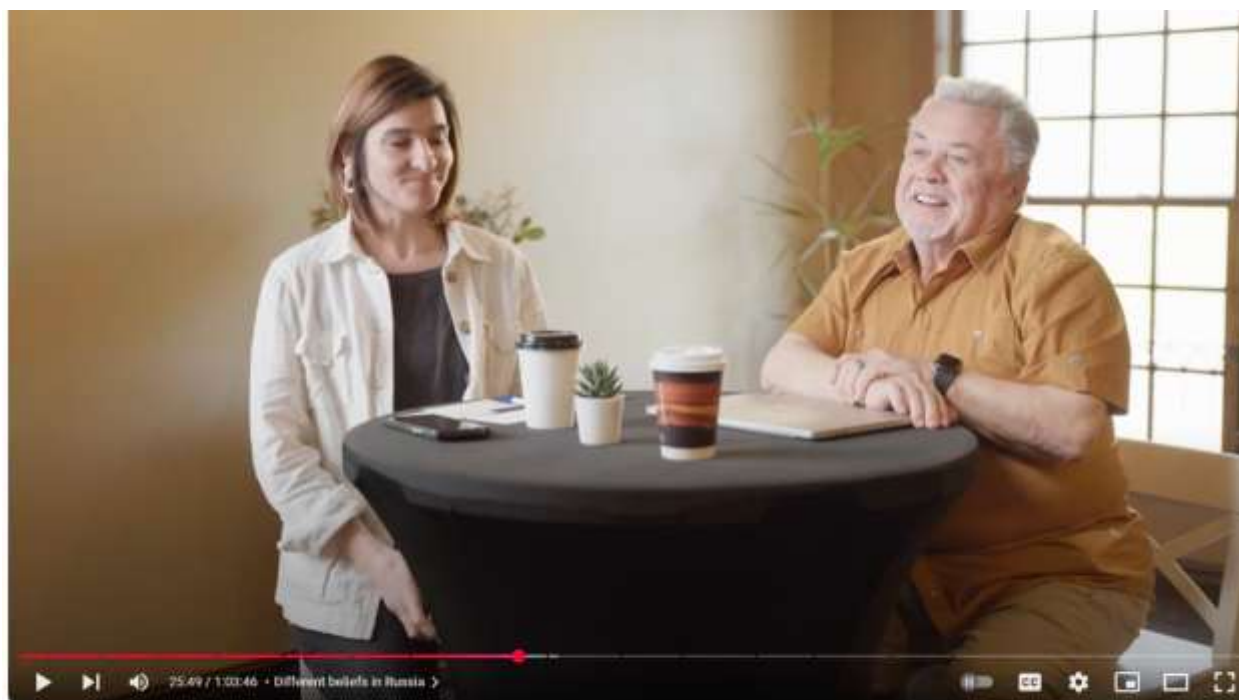




Al Akimoff and his wife Carolyn visited us at the Hubbard Russian Gospel Church.



Childhood friends from Geary Street Church: Paul Soboleff, Paul Wigowsky, and Al Akimoff.



AI Akimoff - Spiritual Inheritance



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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= uH3SooyzO8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH3SooyzO8) (1:03:46) 2023

Al Akimoff, with YWAM Ukraine, has a Ukrainian interpreter, who expertly renders his words into the Ukrainian language. Al talks about the Spiritual Inheritance in the Slavic world, and his hour long discourse is divided essentially into chapters: (1) the Slavid world, (2) Where do they come from, (3) The curse of Ukraine, (4) The history of Ukraine, (5) The history of Russia, (6) Christianity in Russia, (7) Different beliefs in Russia, (8) Orthodox Christianity, (9) Christianity was not a comfortable thing, (10) Orthodox art, (11) the problem with Christianity, (12) the Azusa Street Revival, (13) the journey to China, (14) the journey to Eastern Europe, (15) story of my grandfather, (16) the Holy Spirit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyvWGfmO3NE&t=2s> (1:06:19)

Al Akimoff – Intercession [YWAM Ukraine, Apr 15, 2023] Al discusses the situation in Ukraine and reads from Scripture to affirm that global conflicts are part what is happening in our world today.

## Remembering Brother Andrew | Al Akimoff, YWAM Slavic Ministries

Al Akimoff, founder of YWAM's Slavic Ministries, has been deeply influenced by the life and the example of Brother Andrew who died on Sept. 28, 2022. Jo Hoffmann talks to Al about his personal memories of the founder of Open Doors and the challenges of working as a Christian Missionary behind the Iron Curtain. Jo Hoffmann, European Network of Communities, discusses the challenges and opportunities created by the War in Ukraine. Organizing and financing Summer Youth Camps for traumatized children brought these two Christian ministries even closer together.



## Remembering Brother Andrew | Al Akimoff, YWAM Slavic Ministries



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDH9z88Afr4&t=275s> (16:49) Oct. 22, 2022



## **A Prophetic Vision by Al Akimoff**

Published on: *November 28, 2013*

<https://ywam.org/a-prophetic-vision-by-al-akimoff>

The world was a different place when Loren and Darlene Cunningham established the first YWAM school in Europe. It was a time of revolution, and we were privileged to be part of the “Jesus Revolution.”

Another revolution raged. Half the world was colored red, and if the trend continued the other half wasn’t far behind, this was the “Communist revolution.”

Brother Andrew invited Carolyn and I to work with his small band of Bible smugglers living in Holland. At a secret meeting of Bible smugglers, which included some of the giants of the faith at that time, we were challenged by a young Yugoslav with a seemingly impossible task.

“I don’t understand all of this,” he said, “but I believe we are to translate the Bible into all the languages of the Soviet Union, and make it available for all the peoples and tribes trapped within their borders.”

It was tough to smuggle enough Russian Bibles for a populace forced to speak the language of the empire, but there were 127 distinct languages from unique and diverse cultures represented. Still, we responded that night with a commitment to do the impossible.

The Wall fell twenty years later, and one of the greatest opportunities in the history of missions opened up. It was as though a huge part of the world that had disappeared suddenly appeared again. . .

As YWAM, we believe, practice, and value our ability to hear God’s voice. He is at work today like never before. Political boundaries and belief systems are being shaken. Are we aware of God’s movements? Are we listening to what He’s saying and preparing ourselves for what He’ll do? . . .

### **Short biography:**

Al Akimoff was born in Kuldja, China as the beginning of the wave of baby boomers burst onto the earth. His parents and grandparents had fled from the persecution and famines in Ukraine and after a long journey that took them through the Urals and Central Asia they escaped into China. They had become believers in a brief revival that swept through Ukraine in the late 1920s.

After some more years of traveling across China and living in refugee camps in Japan and Philippines, they arrived in the U.S. where Al grew up

in a Slavic community in San Francisco.

Finding Jesus after a few rebellious years, Al was recruited by Loren Cunningham to join him in a summer outreach in the Caribbean Islands in 1964. It was a summer that changed his life. After graduation from Bible College, Al and several of his college mates traveled to Europe to attend Youth With a Mission's newly launched School of Evangelism.

It was in Lausanne, Switzerland that Al met Carolyn, another early recruit by Loren; she had been traveling in Latin America with YWAM since she was 16 years old. Their paths became one as they led some of the early summer teams to Spain.

An invitation by Brother Andrew to come to work with him in Eastern Europe took Al and Carolyn to Holland and Eastern Europe. Al's first Bible smuggling trip was to Moscow in 1970.

In 1973 Al and Carolyn founded YWAM Slavic Ministries to initiate evangelism and discipleship in Eastern Europe. This year marks 40 years that they have ministered among the Slavic peoples of the world pioneering many ministries in the nations scattered across Eastern Europe.



LIGHTING THE TORCH | AL AKIMOFF



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ua2oWj388pg> (1:39) May 13, 2019

**LIGHTING THE TORCH | AL AKIMOFF** YWAM – our symbol has always been a young person with a torch. Al: “My torch, You’ll have to pry it from my cold, dead hands.” “Together we create more fire, and we take it around the world.”

"Go! Win the world! Run! Outrun us! But you need to catch us first, because we won't stop." - Al Akimoff

**Carry the torch and light the world with your passion for God!**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDH9z88Afr4> (16:49)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51D31pQd3QI> (17:45) Feb 3, 2022

Get that water boiling and that coffee ground. The brew starts now as we get to know Al Akimoff. Al is one of our Legacy Elders and we had a great time getting to know who he is and learned about some of his time here in our region of YWAM.





## Ukraine Ministries by YWAM Slavic Ministries and ENC



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ4ZRd9M3tk&t=3s> (18:18)

Jun 18, 2022

## Ukraine Ministries by YWAM Slavic Ministries and ENC

### Homecoming at BBC reflects the past

SANTA CRUZ, CALIF.—Activities for Bethany Bible College's 1985 homecoming included chapel services reflective of the 1920, 1950, and 1960 decades.

Tuesday's chapel service featured the 1920s theme. Students were attired in 1920s clothing and segregated seating was practiced—men on the left and women on the right.

Chapel speaker was Elisabeth Elliot. Elliot is the widow of Jim Elliot—one of five missionaries killed by the Auca Indians in Ecuador almost 30 years ago.

Wednesday was the 1950s day. Segregated seating continued. Charlotte Heeteby, a Glad

Tidings Bible Institute graduate, shared her missions experiences. She and her husband served 37 years as missionaries in the Fiji Islands.

The 1960s was Thursday's theme. Segregated chapel seating ended. Guest speaker was Al Akimoff, a 1969 BBC graduate, who heads the Slavic Ministries of Youth With a Mission.

During homecoming the Distinguished Service Award was presented to Dr. Leslie Holdcroft. Holdcroft had served as an instructor, academic dean, and vice president at BBC. He now is president of Western Pentecostal Bible College in Canada.

A clip from the past, Bethany Bible College, 1985, Al Akimoff, speaker





Drop In Discussion AL Akimoff Ukraine Prayer



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361 views · Sep 19, 2022

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWjmTKK\\_5Z8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWjmTKK_5Z8) (34:06)

Al Akimoff, who established YWAM Ukraine in 1973, discusses the situation in Ukraine. The date of the recording is September 19, 2022. Al gives credit to President Zelensky of Ukraine for being a good leader for the country as they continue to fight against Russian aggression. He discusses how YWAM is helping in Ukraine.



## Ukraine Prayer Letter – 155

Posted on September 25, 2022 by Al Akimoff

<https://www.ywamslavicministries.org/author/alakimoff/>

The news is currently full of stories and pictures of the mobilization of reservists and the fear of being drafted by young men throughout Russia. Borders are backed up by many miles, airplane tickets are not only very expensive but are sold out for weeks. Trains and other means of transport are filled to capacity. This of course brings the interest of the whole world to this situation.

Stories are coming out of Russia that some villages are totally empty of men as especially poor and remote places are being targeted. Minority people who already make up a disproportional amount of the military are once again targeted for mobilization. Where this comes home is when it hits your friends and families. Zhenya, a Y leader who left earlier and is abroad now wrote about how his family is affected as now his sister and brother-in-law are among these masses and 10 families from his church. There are 10 families from his not very large church who are leaving, then multiply this by the hundreds of churches affected and you begin to feel and see the situation for what it is.

Our Y family is also affected by this and many of them are part of these masses as well. How I wish we could give you their names and show you pictures of them, but we can't. All we can ask you for is prayer for them. I just received a phone call from Russia asking for just that: "Please pray for us!"

There are no details to share at this point, only a desperate request for prayer. Can we pray for miracles, for protection, for difficult decisions that have to be made. Pray that this can be a turning point in this war, that the people of Russia will finally rise up and stand against this evil.

Al Akimoff and the Slavic Ministries Team

<https://www.4kact.com/prayer/archives/05-2024> (archives, prayers for Ukraine)

<https://www.ywamslavicministries.org/2022/07/> (archives, prayers for Ukraine)



**Al Akimoff is the director of Youth With A Mission's Slavic Ministries. He offers some valuable perspective on the history of Ukraine & Russia.**

### **Al Akimoff**

#### **Odessa**

**In these last few days, the bombing has shifted away from the surroundings of Kyiv to the Black Sea cities of Mykolaev and Odessa. Weeks ago, it seemed as though Odessa was on its way to conquest when storms and other strange things seemed to force the invading army back.**

**My heart sinks as I think of this beautiful old city being bombed, thinking of Kyiv had the same effect on me. We have spent a lot of investment personally in these cities. My family comes from this area as they lived in the Mykolaev region. One of my cousins hid in a basement for some time as the city was being bombed before she was rescued, her son is still there fighting for its liberation.**

**My wife Carolyn's family were Germans brought to Crimea by Catherine the Great and lived and farmed there for several generations before immigrating to the U.S.**

**Odessa has a spiritual historical dimension that bears telling. At the turn of the century a young man named Ivan Voronaev immigrated to the U.S. He found himself in the midst of a revival that had started in a little church on a street named Azusa in Los Angeles.**

**This encounter introduced him to the New Testament power and leading of the Holy Spirit, which led him to return to Ukraine with this message of revival. He came to Odessa. He began to share this message with the Ukrainian people, and they responded with repentance and a welcome for God to be among them.**

**In the few short years that he preached, taught and sent out disciples, over 17,000 people were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. My grandfather was one of those.**

He was one of the first to respond to leave his home to take the gospel to Russia where he too saw the whole village he went to respond to the message and receive salvation.

It was shortly after this revival that Voronaev and his wife were arrested and sent to the gulag where he died. His wife fulfilled her sentence of 25 years. My grandfather too was arrested and sent to prison but was miraculously released and began his 25-year journey across the Soviet Union, Central Asia and China. In the next years Stalin removed millions of Ukrainians and spread them out across the whole of the Soviet Union to Siberia, the far east, the Caucasus and beyond. Little did he realize that he was helping to spread the revival to all of these places. It was these disciples of Voronaev that became the foundation of what we came to know as the underground church of Russia. At the same time Stalin replaced the Ukrainians with millions of Russians that has created the problem that we are facing today and the reason why there are breakaway regions all across the former Soviet Union.

Ukraine has been the spiritual center of Eastern Europe. It is estimated that 70% of the evangelical churches in Russia today have Ukrainian pastors. Ukrainian churches can be found all over the former Soviet Union. In fact, they can be found all across Europe, the U.S. and the world. We have many Ukrainians in YWAM spread around the world.

So, you can maybe see why we Ukrainians cry when we see the news these days. When we see our beautiful old cities like Odessa and Kyiv being bombed. The city of my mother and her family being literally totally wiped off the face of the earth.

You can maybe understand why we feel that this is spiritual warfare from the enemy who is not pleased with the spiritual history of these places.

Will you join us in earnest prayer these next few days and weeks? Pray that this senseless killing will stop. These are young boys that are dying every day in both armies. Pray for the many thousands still under siege in Mykolaev without food and water. Pray for our young disciples, our ywam teams today who are sacrificially going into these places rescuing people and taking food and supplies to them. Pray for miracles.

For updates on the Ukraine situation go to: [www.ywamslavicministries.org](http://www.ywamslavicministries.org)

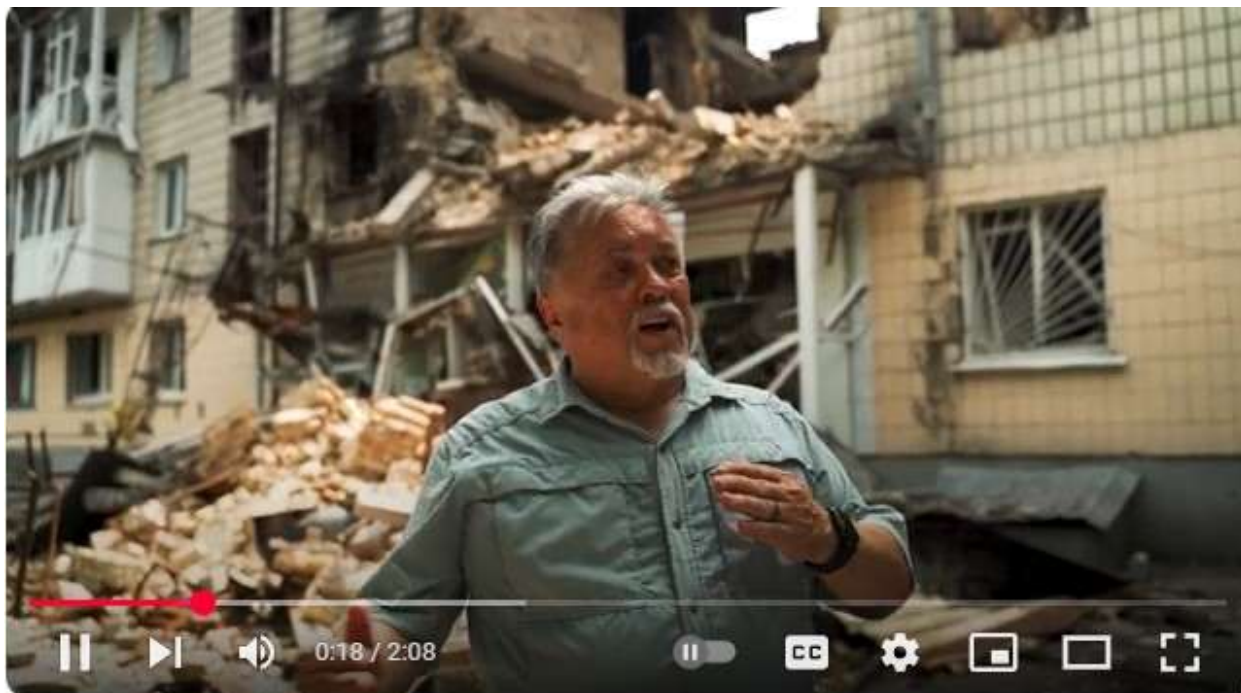


<https://ywampodcast.net/shows/prayer/pray-for-ukraine/>

**YWAM teams inside and outside of Ukraine are urgently providing assistance to people suffering from the war in that nation. Please pray for them and for the situation in Ukraine. YWAM began its work in Ukraine when the nation was still under Soviet rule. We now have teams in five locations. One of those locations, in Ternopil, has become the main refugee processing center in the city. In Kyiv YWAMers are delivering food to people in need and driving hundreds to safe shelter. Other YWAM teams in countries surrounding Ukraine have been helping refugees. Those countries include Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Moldova, and others. Please pray with us for Ukraine, for the refugees from Ukraine, and for YWAM's work to care for the victims of this tragedy. Please join YWAM's prayer initiative called The Invitation and pray right now and join us on our prayer day, March 10.**

- 1. Pray for peace and for miracles. Our battle lies not with flesh and blood (Eph 6:2). As the YWAM family, let us pray as the Holy Spirit leads and let's go deeper than just what the news shows us**
- 2. Pray for YWAM's ministry in Ukraine. In Kyiv YWAMers are risking their lives to deliver food to people in need or to drive children or adults to shelter. Our YWAM location in Ternopil is now the main refugee processing center for the city. They need help with food, bedding and other supplies for themselves and the many thousands they are serving. They are working with pastors throughout the city to find space for refugees. The mayor recently called them to say 6,000 more refugees are on their way.**
- 3. Pray for refugees from Ukraine, including our own YWAMers. Pray for YWAM's efforts to help these refugees in Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Moldova, Germany, and other nations.**





## Al Akimoff, Homes of Hope, and YWAM Kyiv

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMi8NKKPt0k> (2:08)

Jul 20, 2022

We are beginning a campaign to raise money and build 100 homes to keep Ukrainians warm for the winter. <https://www.ywamkyiv.org/warm-for-winter>

## ***Post-Soviet Soil: Harvesting or Sowing?***

*Al Akimoff*

Some time ago I sat in a large church in Kyiv, Ukraine, listening to a visiting evangelist from America share a testimony. He told how he had been walking through the capital's main square when he noticed a large political rally in progress. He walked up to the stage and asked if he as a visiting American could speak to the crowd. They gave him the microphone and he proceeded to preach the gospel to over 2,000 people for five minutes. He asked how many wanted to accept Jesus and 2,000 hands went up. "Isn't that wonderful," he asked the congregation. There was no response. He couldn't imagine why they could not see that this was one of the greatest evangelistic miracles of all time, happening right in their own city. They, in the meantime, were looking around trying to figure out where were the hundreds of new converts that should have been in their church that morning.

In contrast, I was in Albania just weeks after the country had opened up. Youth With A Mission (YWAM) was there along with a number of other missions to conduct a first-ever joint stadium crusade. It was agreed that we would work together and abide by some strict policies that were jointly drafted. First, we would use only the Book of John for all our preaching and teaching and this would be given to the people on the first night. Altar calls would not be made. Rather, seekers would be invited to the city park the next day for further instruction from the Book of John. This was the pattern every evening and every day. After a week, people were invited to respond and were then asked to join a special class which prepared them for baptism. Fifty people came on that Saturday to a lake in the middle of Tirana to profess their new-found faith in Jesus. Many more came the next day to the very first Sunday service to hear the new believers testify. Two new churches and a YWAM Discipleship School were planted out of that outreach.

We have all witnessed good and bad efforts at evangelism these past years. Since I work with thousands of young people who are very eager in their enthusiasm for winning the lost, I am used to criticism. I must say that we try in our training to teach responsible evangelism and I personally make a very big point of discouraging our workers from giving altar calls, especially in schools and street outreaches. I can't say that I have always been successful, and zeal sometimes still prevails over cultural sensitivity.

I really have been surprised recently at the kind of criticism leveled at almost all evangelistic efforts, from the church in the East and the church in the West, levelled at Billy Graham and The CoMission, at many famous and not-so-famous evangelists. After all, who hasn't gone to Russia or the other former Communist lands in these last years? The questions indigenous churches ask are very valid and I have to say that I agree with some of what is being voiced. After all the stadium crusades, school and prison outreaches, and all the thousands of hands that were raised to accept Jesus, what is there to show for it? How many churches were started after some of these outreaches started meetings in theaters and culture centers with hundreds of people? A number of these meetings are now down to a handful of people. And these are the small percentage that actually came to church out of all those who heard and responded.

Now that the dust is beginning to settle, we can see a little more clearly. But as we look toward the future things don't look too hopeful and there are a lot of questions as to who should have gone and what should have been done. Many are now looking at these last few years as the golden years of evangelism that are now over or coming to an end. Is the harvest over?

My question is, was it really a harvest? Let's look at the ministry of Jesus which lasted only a few years and in many ways was similar to what we are experiencing now. Jesus had a tremendous following. Thousands crowded around him wherever he went. But how much did he harvest? At his death even his disciples were not sure where they stood. The problem was in their understanding of the gospel, or misunderstanding. It was not until Jesus stood before them after his resurrection that their understanding became clear. What he had told them about the temple being destroyed and in three days being restored was finally understood. He was talking about himself, not the temple. They had thought so much in the physical realm. They sought to make of him a political figure while all along he was sharing with them a gospel that they just did not comprehend. In Russia people have also followed our lead out of curiosity, or even out of economic interests. Some were intrigued by the politics. Partially it was our fault. We gave them a very limited view of the gospel. After all, how much of the gospel can you really give in a five-minute message, or even a half-hour one. That's revivalism, not evangelism.

<https://eastwestreport.org/articles/ew05202.htm>

**Read this interesting article from:**

**Vol. 5, No. 2, Spring 1997, Covering the Former Soviet Union and East Central Europe**

***Al Akimoff is director of Youth With A Mission Slavic Ministries, Salem, OR.***

## **A Christmas Story**

It was Christmas eve, 50 years ago. Back then the country was called Czechoslovakia and it was behind a border that was known as the "Iron Curtain." Carolyn and I were newly married and had recently joined Brother Andrew's little band of smugglers. On this trip we were joined by our good friends, Joe and Judi Portale. Snow lightly covered the road we were traveling on and we had quite a distance to get to our destination in the north, called Moravia.

The guards at the border where we had just crossed over from Germany were benevolent that day as it was Christmas Eve and even though they were Communists, their nicer selves came out as they waved us through the normally strict border. Of course, we attributed this to the heavy duty praying we had done before the crossing, asking God to blind the eyes of the guards. Our car was packed with Bibles and some suitcases with a very special cargo.

Some weeks before a merchant from the north of Holland called and asked if anyone was going East in the near future. He had a lot of beautiful winter clothes and God had put it on his heart that perhaps there was a need that this could meet, so we had several suitcases besides our own in the back of the vehicle.



After a long day's drive, we arrived at our destination just as it was getting dark. I knocked at the door of a house that was conveniently hidden on a quiet street. The kindly man, a Moravian pastor, invited us into their home. They were in the middle of their Christmas Eve celebration that they called "the love feast." When I shared with him that we had brought Bibles, he was so happy, but when I told him we had brought some winter clothes, surprisingly, he was even more happy.

He explained to us that the Bibles and the clothes were headed for Russia and that the very next day they would be on their way. Our timing was God ordained. We continued to celebrate with the family with a fresh carp that had been kept in the bathtub until it was time to be baked and served. There were oranges in a bowl on the table that were a once-a-year treat. We finished the night off with breaking a special wafer and passing it around sharing good thoughts toward each other.

It was some years later when Carolyn and I were once again in Czechoslovakia, in the beautiful city of Prague. We called our friend to tell him we were in the city when he excitedly told us to get to their house as



quickly as possible. He was with us that special Christmas Eve long ago as a boy, now he was grown and was himself a pastor in the city. When we arrived at his house, he excitedly brought us to his friends, a couple who had just arrived from the Soviet Union.

He introduced us to them saying, "These are the people who brought the winter clothes". They teared up and began to hug us. The young lady then told us her story: "We are the family of Joseph Bondorenko," (a well-known evangelist who had spent many years in prison for his preaching of the Word), "That Christmas they came and arrested him once again and to punish him more severely, they took everything we owned, including our clothes. They left us totally destitute. Then these suitcases arrived, filled with the most beautiful winter clothes. It was a Christmas gift we would never forget, thank you, thank you, thank you."

The story above is true! All the characters in the story had a role to play, the merchant with his generosity and obedience to call us. We obeyed the call to go, specifically on Christmas eve. The kindly pastor who welcomed us into his home and knew that there was something more to this visit and the timeliness of it. God was the director, bringing all these events together to bless this family. Often people have asked us, "What were you doing on such and such a night? We had a burden to pray for you."

All of us are an important part of a God directed team and have a role in building the Kingdom.



**Al & Carolyn in Czechoslovakia 1971**

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**It all started with a dream.**

**A young girl dreamed of being a missionary, she prepared herself, studied language, went to Bible College and then God gave her another dream, a person she could share her dream with. It was a match made in heaven. They could see eye to eye in almost every way. Thus, an adventure began that took them around the world and placed them in the center of the history of the Slavic people in this tumultuous century. Many of you have shared that adventure with us through your prayers, your support and going and working with us. Thank you for standing with us these 50 years.**

**— with [Carolyn Akimoff](#).**

**I received this newsletter from Alex Akimoff (Sep 8, 2025)**

### **News from AI & Carolyn**



#### **The Silk Road**

**A little over 10 years ago, Carolyn and I had the privilege of helping to lead and teach a wonderful group of young Mongolians and Chinese, it was called the Silk Road DTS. It began at the beginning of what is called the Silk Road in Xian. We traveled across to the remote part of China called Xinjian, and a city called Kulrja, my birthplace. We stayed in Yurts and taught on the open plains of these ancient trading routes. It was an incredible experience.**



**Recently I received an invitation that I couldn't resist . Would I like to continue the journey on that Silk Road through some of the most unreachable areas of the world today.**

**I am leaving on a month long journey through areas that still tug at my heart. I first traveled to Central Asia in 1973, when it was part of the Soviet Union. I was able to visit underground believers and found some of my relatives who ended up stranded in some of these places as my family fled through them. I was able to be involved in the first pioneering efforts when the Soviet Union fell apart and these countries first opened to the gospel. What an incredible time that was to live through.**



**These many years later, the church has grown, albeit, slowly in these countries but some of them remain very closed still. It is these places that we hope to visit, to pray, to meet the people who live there, to see what God will do.**

**Would you pray for me, for my team? Carolyn cannot travel with me on this journey, but my son Tim has volunteered to go with me. This will be an interesting trip for him and we will be joined by others along the way, all people who are tied to these lands in deep ways.**

**I can't share much at this point but I promise to share more when I return. If you feel that you would like to pray for us, send me a note ([alakimoff@gmail.com](mailto:alakimoff@gmail.com)) and I will send you updates and more details. Please do not share or post this letter without asking me. This also promises to be one of the most costly journeys and although I don't often ask for finances for us, if you do feel led to help in this, it would be a huge blessing.**

**Thank you for your continued prayers for us, we are both healing from our knee and shoulder operations and are almost back to “normal.” Pray for Carolyn who will be without me for a month.**

**Do you think I can pass as a Central Asian?**



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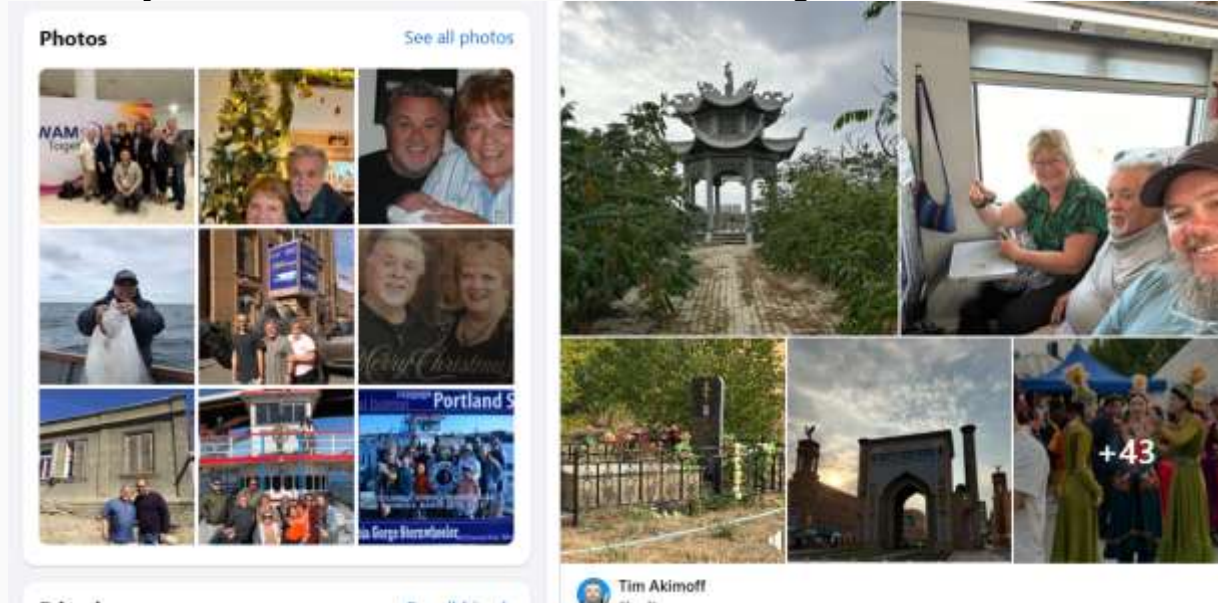
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**Posted by Al Akimoff and son Tim – Facebook/Instagram, 9-24-2025**



<https://wigowsky.com/RGT/GearySt/AIAAsia.pdf> **Retracing Ancestors' Epic Journey**

Dad and I have been traipsing across Northwest China and Central Asia for the past 16 days. It has been everything I thought it would be. Wild adventure, beautiful places and people, good food and fellowship.

We spent a few days in Urumqi and Yining (Gulja or Kulja), the town my dad was born in. We visited the likely burial place of two of dad's siblings and spent some time visiting some of the houses in the quarter my grandparents lived in. And we ate the foods that my grandmother learned to cook when she lived here.

We flew over the Tien Shan mountains to Almaty, Kazakhstan and then to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where we stayed at a beautiful farmhouse near lake Issyk-Kul for a few days.

We continued our travels in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and took a train to the legendary Silk Road city of Samarkand, where we spent several days looking for the remains of ancient monasteries from the 4th Century in the mountains that separate Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Then it was on to Bukhara, Uzbekistan, where we are preparing to travel to Turkmenistan.

This is dad's last stan, the only stan he has not traveled to since he began visiting this part of the world in the 1970s. I've been documenting the trip in detail over on Instagram if you'd like to follow along - (Tim Akimoff)

[https://www.instagram.com/tea\\_and\\_silk\\_roads/](https://www.instagram.com/tea_and_silk_roads/)