

Personal Testimony: Marilyn Gibbs

Story by Christmas M. Beeler

Serving Christ in Eastern Europe for 15 Years



Marilyn Gibbs

Marilyn Gibbs stood in the cathedral, staring up at the beautifully colored windows, soaking in the silence and the reverence around her. Backpacking through nine European countries in nine weeks, Marilyn was taking a

break from her unfulfilled life as a restaurant manager and frequenter of clubs. Deep down, past her anger and bitterness, was loneliness. She wanted to be loved. Today she realized something else: She wanted to know God. Though she had once accepted Christ, she had not walked with Him for nearly 16 years.

Turning to her companions, she said, “I think I was a Christian once, and I was very happy.” They were incredulous. After she returned to Southern California, she was invited to CC Costa Mesa. When she first began attending the worship service, “I would sit in the back and cry because I thought I had lost my chance to know Him,” she recalled.

One day, Pastor Chuck Smith, senior pastor at CC Costa Mesa, was teaching on grace. He said, “No matter what you have done, God is the God of second chances.”

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

That night, Marilyn dedicated her life to serve God. Soon after, she heard about mission trips to Russia. She sensed that this was her calling; she was to study His Word and prepare to go. She changed jobs, leaving behind the atmosphere of stress and drinking, and spent just under three years regularly attending church and growing in God’s Word.

She worked with an evangelism ministry and encouraged young ladies in their new walks

with Christ. In 1993, she headed to the Bible College in Austria with a one-way ticket.

The Lord opened doors along the way. Initially she served on staff at the CC Bible College, located in Austria at the time. Then she worked in Romania for four years. “I learned a lot about ministry: At our first outreach, I was on my knees scrubbing the church floor,” she said with a smile. “The Lord was just breaking me. I had been in management for years; I was an older woman—He was just crushing my pride and independence.”

Serving in a coal-mining town in central Romania, Marilyn heard of the terrible conditions of the state-run children’s hospital and orphanage. She prayed that God would use her and the other believers to help the children. One day as she was reading her Bible, she felt that she should go buy diapers. At a local store, she found disposable diapers—a rarity at the time—and headed to the hospital. She approached the lady at the front gate and said simply, “I have Pampers,” holding up the plastic package. After Marilyn was allowed through three other checkpoints in the same manner, the nurse on the nursery floor casually pointed her to the room with the orphan babies. Marilyn was let into the ward without question.

“The conditions were horrible,” she recounted. “Babies were lying in urine, feces, vomit. I thought, ‘Lord, I can’t do this.’ And He reminded me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you.’ I said, ‘Okay, one baby at a time.’” She left that day, walking through the town in a daze for 20 minutes, stunned by what she had seen.

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

Marilyn returned daily with other helpers. She recalled, “I felt like I was His hands—to

hold those babies and love them. We would talk to them, sing worship songs, hold them. I remember the first time one of them made eye contact—it was such a breakthrough. I thought, ‘Oh Lord, thank You.’”

“I’m not afraid to go where He leads.”

Teaching Romanian believers practical ministry was a blessing, she said. “We had a ‘diaper team’ of 14 high-school and college-age young ladies from the church who would visit the hospital.” Later, some young men joined in ministering at the baby orphanage. Through other CCs in Europe and the States, the Lord provided supplies for the orphanage.

She later met the Markey family, who had planted the first CC in Kiev, Ukraine, and felt the Lord calling her to join them. “I didn’t want to move to Ukraine because of the Chernobyl disaster [in 1986]. I was scared; I had told the Lord that I would go anywhere but there. I felt like He asked me if I was making decisions based on my comfort or on His will.” Marilyn had burst out in tears: “I trust You. I’ll go.” In the next few weeks, she was miraculously able to obtain a 5-year, multiple-entry visa. Currently Marilyn serves with George Markey, Jr., and his wife, Sharon, in Ternopil, Ukraine.

“Over and over, God leads and He provides. It’s really crazy in worldly terms, but He is so faithful,” she said. “It seems the Lord uses me in a place and then moves me on. I’m not afraid to go where He leads.” After serving in Hungary for two years, Marilyn has been ministering in Ukraine for seven years.

“Be blessed in your singleness,” she encouraged other believers, “because you can serve God in your singleness until you are married. Be available to Him.” ☺

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