

REPORT FROM MARIUPOL, UKRAINE

January 2006

Dear Brethren,

Greetings and best wishes for the New Year from Mariupol. The previous month has been by far the most pleasant and encouraging I have spent in this country due to the arrival of my fiancée Amanda Campbell and our friend Rachel Davis. As I mentioned in my last report, I have been looking forward to their visit for some time. As their departure nears, I cannot say emphatically enough that the time we have spent together has far exceeded my hopes and expectations.

Isolation is one of the most difficult aspects of this job. Thus, I am always glad to see visitors. During the holidays, it can be especially hard to be separated from those whom I am closest to. Thankfully, this year, I did not have to struggle through the coldest, darkest time of the year alone.

I was also eager to find out how Amanda would deal with the living conditions here. Having traveled to this part of the world twice before, she knew something of what to expect. Also, over the course of time, I have been able to make my apartment much more comfortable than it was when I first came. However, it is still not up to American standards by any means. The frequent outages of power, heat, or water (sometimes all three at once!) are a nuisance and the dearth of foods and products we are accustomed to having can be irritating. In any case, Amanda has put up with all of these inconveniences without complaining and done a terrific job of taking care of me for the past three weeks. In many ways, we have had a small taste of what our life here will be like – except, of course, that I have to be out of the house by 10:30 every night.

Olga, my landlady, very graciously offered to let me use her spare room during the girls' visit. Her house is about a 10 minute walk from my apartment and has made my life much easier during this time. Other than having to fend off a couple drunks and a stray dog every so often, my walks there have been uneventful.

Our studies together have continued during this time as well. However, due to the arrival of her 5-year-old granddaughter and the usual hustle and bustle that accompanies the end of the year in this part of the world, they have moved from every Monday, to every other Monday. Even so, her interest in the material remains high and I hope that we will be able to return to our original schedule shortly.

Rachel Davis has also dealt with the conditions here very well (in fact, better than some of the guys who have visited). Amanda and I are indebted to her for making this trip possible. I have no idea what we would have done without her. It has been a great joy for both of us to spend time with her. Being cooped up together for an extended period of time is enough to put a strain on any friendship. Such has not been the case with us.

That is not to say that the girls' visit has been entirely without incident. My next-door neighbor was very excited to meet the girls and decided that she ought to have us over and get better acquainted. This would have been fine, I suppose, except that her tastes in food differ wildly from ours. For some reason, she thinks that caviar, mushrooms, and cabbage make for a great meal – especially if you top it off with some nice smoked pig fat!

In four years of working in this part of the world, I have been forced to eat some pretty disgusting things. This meal was among the worst ever. I really felt for the girls, who are a good deal pickier and have had less time to adjust to eating strange foods than I have. It did help that they had a 70 year old granny standing over them the entire time refilling their plates and yelling, "EAT EAT!!" Even worse, she refused to give them anything to drink until they cleaned their plates! It was all I could do not to puke, and I know it must have been 10 times worse for the girls. I've never been so glad to drink tea after a meal in my life.

The girls have also been a great help in showing hospitality during their visit. We were able to invite all the Christians, my interpreters, my landlord, landlady, and their granddaughter over for a feast on the 24th. Amanda cooked (nearly all night, and most of the day), Rachel washed dishes (for nearly as long), and I ran back and forth between the apartment and the store. In all, we fed 15 people during the course of the afternoon. Although I did something similar by myself last year, all agreed that this was much bigger, better, and more successful than anything I was able to pull off.

Amanda and Rachel have been an encouragement to the saints here as well. Their presence was especially helpful during a time of year filled with temptations for the brethren to return their former bad habits. I was very happy to see everyone present this past Sunday morning (the morning after New Years Eve, which is the biggest celebration of the year in this part of the world). Last year, only three were present and two were still so drunk they couldn't even leave the house! I'm sure that an additional year of spiritual growth helped, but I am also convinced that the desire not to embarrass themselves in front of our guests was an added incentive to remain faithful.

It is hard to believe that our time together has passed so quickly. However, we will be traveling to Kiev after worship this Sunday so that the girls can make their 7 am return flight. Please pray for their safety as they travel home. If you would like to hear their thoughts on their time here you may e-mail Amanda at atamandochka@mac.com and Rachel at spiritrld@hotmail.com

I am looking forward to the coming year of work here. We are finishing up our survey of the Bible and are preparing to move into a more in-depth 5 year program. Several have expressed an interest in visiting this year but few have made firm plans as of yet. However, Shane and Mary Frances Gillespie will be arriving to help out February 14th. Also, Matt Allen is hoping to return on July 17 and spend the rest of the month working here. The rest of the calendar is open. If anyone would like to come and stay for the time I am in the states this spring, that would be especially helpful. I have noticed that most of those who are considering making the trip wish to do so after Amanda will be here to cook for them. Interesting.

As I mentioned last month, I will be needing an increase in support beginning in June. Right now, I estimate this need to be between \$500 and \$700 per month. If you would like more information or know of a group to whom I could send a request please let me know.

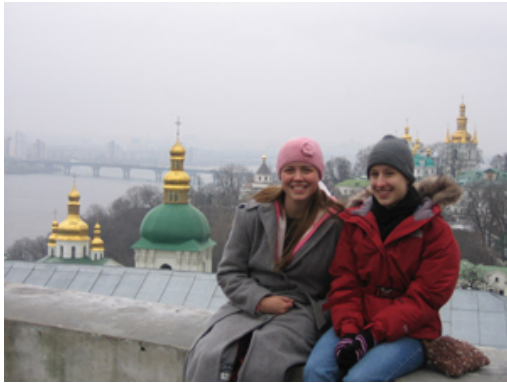
Thank you all once again for your support and prayers as I work here. I pray that the Lord will continue to bless us all as we work for Him.

In Him,

Matt Duggin

e-mail: mattmanua@mac.com
phone: 011 38 0629 52 40 80
blog: <http://mattmanua.pleonast.com>
mobile: 011 38 0509 19 83 99

address: UL. Baxmutskaya
House 120 Flat 123
Mariupol 87554



Amanda/Rachel in Kiev



Amanda and Matt



Christmas dinner