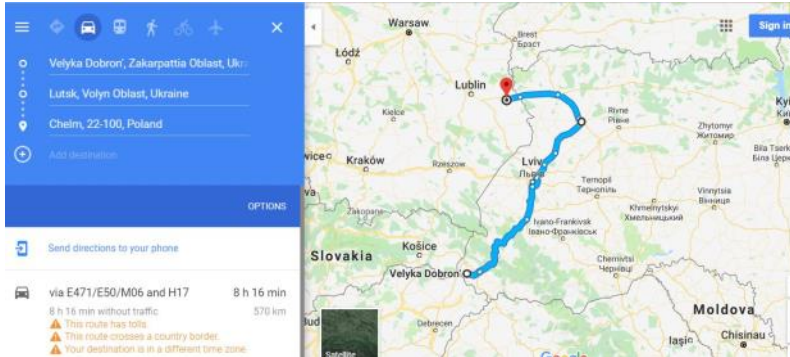


Good Samaritan Children's Home, Velika Dobron, Ukraine

Good Samaritan Children's Charities, LLC

February - March, 2019

After six weeks in the US, and a great Christmas and New Year's break, I boarded a flight to Kyiv on January 29 and arrived at Borispol Airport on the 30th. I was questioned a bit by border security because I had technically overstayed my visa by one day. I had to leave in December after the Migration Service in Kher-son failed to process my residence card because the photo they took was allegedly unusable. They notified me on December 7 and it was the 18th before I could get a train and flight so I technically overstayed one day, (Visas are not necessary for US citizens if staying less than 90 days in 180 days)



So I slept on the plane Tuesday for an hour or two, slept on the train Wednesday night, then Thursday Laci Katko, director, said we were leaving for Lutsk to pick up a new van he bought from Norway that was in transit in Poland. He had to bring it across the border himself and through customs to be registered properly. We drove to Lutsk that night - with an hour or two sleep in the car.



In Lutsk, we waited half a day for the car broker to wake up then we completed some paper work amid assurances that all would be OK and we would smoothly cross the border because they had "people". As we were finishing a very nice dinner, they called and said the broker's brother would pick us up and we would go meet the van in Poland. The brother was a maniac. We drove to the border, less than two hours away at literally 100 mph! We didn't hit potholes - we flew over them. All the while he bragged about his "people". We waited at the Ukrainian side for a few hours and then at the Polish side another hour or so. When we left the check point we saw this unbelievable line of cars and trucks waiting to cross back to Ukraine. "Don't worry, we will glide through, I've got "people"".



We found our van waiting in line - it pulled out and followed us to a small all-night grocery where Laci inspected the van and I tried to buy some food and drink - it was now about 3am - but my card was not accepted and I didn't have zloty. We got in the van and drove up and down the *5 kilometer long line of trucks and cars looking for our "people"*, which of course we never found - so, to the end of the line, bub! In freezing cold, we moved 100 yards at a time for the next 15 hours. Then 3 hours at the Polish side and 5 hours at the Ukrainian side (the visa issue popped up again) where we finally got a bad sandwich and some coffee. Two hours back to Lutsk, arriving at 3 am Saturday night. Up at 7am, we drove home Sunday, arriving in time for dinner. The van was still in Lutsk - it had more customs stuff to go through to get a Ukrainian plate. That night I figured out how to fake being in the US so I could watch the Super Bowl - until 5am! It was two weeks before I finally could sleep normally.



The 9 passenger van was delivered about two weeks later. The seats all have seat belts and are easily movable so a wheelchair can come in the back and pull alongside a single seat and after transferring the passenger, the seats can be replaced and the wheelchair stowed behind. Sliding doors on each side make for easy access. It has been a great asset, especially for the handicapped girls.



We drove a group of girls to an older school building in the village which has been converted to a sort of cultural center. They had an afternoon of instruction and hands-on experience in weaving traditional Hungarian cloths on hand operated wooden looms. Many of the cloths they produce here go to other cultural centers for exhibition. Every one got a turn and quickly caught on under Giselle's watchful eye and kind instruction. (left): Slava, Adrienne, Olesia, Marika, Magdi, Estee at the loom, and Giselle.



A nice break in the weather allowed workers to install the green grass-like carpet in the inner courtyard that they had concreted in the fall. The trampoline is in the background. It is a great step forward to have an all-weather play area. The workmen are also finishing up the installation of new windows in the upstairs bedrooms, after which they paint and add wall coverings for a fresh new look.



Odesa



I took a 19 hour overnight train from Uzhhord to Odesa and then a bus for 3 hours to Kherson to meet my wife, Irina, and pick up my residency card. Magnificent train station in Odesa. On the return I had 6 hours to kill so I went to dinner at Gambrius where we had a banquet when observing the mayoral elections in 2015. At 150 years old, it was originally a rough neck sailors' bar in a vaulted basement. The food and service are quite good. A Greek salad and chicken with grilled vegetables were delicious. Passed up on Domino's but did check it out and aside from some of the options was just like home!



I have been to State Migration Service offices 10 times since summer trying to obtain my "green card". Bureaucrats on top of snarky bureaucrats! After finally getting my pile of documents accepted and a photo taken on Thanksgiving

Day, I thought I was done. But then they called and said I had to return because the picture was unusable. I wrote and complained to everyone I could and even had a former president of Ukraine write a letter. It paid off - instead of taking a new picture, they had the card completed with the original "unusable" one. Maybe they didn't get all my chins? Or were waiting for a bribe??

(You have probably seen Odesa most often with 2 s's. That is the Russian convention. Ukrainian is one s.)