



## *A summer to remember*

**WE ARE IN SHOCK. WE HAVE NO JOB, NO APARTMENT.  
CAN YOU HELP US?**

**THOSE WORDS** jumped off my computer screen through email, alerting me that my two young friends were in trouble. I was reading the message several hours after it had been written. My mind wondered frantically what had happened to them since their cry for help.

Twenty-year-old Laura and Irina left their homeland in Kazakhstan with the promise of summer work in America. It was an adventure intended to increase their English speaking skills, earn enough money to pay their trip expenses, and experience the pleasures of America for a season. Less than 12 hours after arriving at JFK International Airport, their plans had already fallen apart.

The girls had signed contracts through a New York based work exchange program for Irina to work

in laundry and Laura to waitress in motels in Ocean City, MD.

They had completed their third year studying International Law at the University in Almaty just days before embarking on their trip to America. Summer jobs were not available in their city. While their parents were reluctant to send their

daughters 7,000 miles from home for work, friends encouraged them to take advantage of the opportunity to see America.

After paying a stranger to drive them from JFK, they arrived exhausted late on Saturday night in the beach resort of Ocean City. Young people from many countries had arrived at this location weeks

earlier to start their summer jobs. Eager to begin, Irina reported for work early Sunday morning only to be told her job had been given away. Laura was warned by other exchange students that the motel she was contracted to work for had a reputation for prostitution. They said girls went there and never came

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back. Those words were enough to warn her not to even go to the hotel. Panic set in when they could not find other work opportunities.

They had my contact information safely tucked away in case of an emergency. My husband Vernon and I met Laura and Irina while we were in Kazakhstan with a mission team a few weeks before they came to the

States. When they explained their plans in coming to the U.S. for the summer, I told them to contact me if they had any problems.

When the desperate email came, my heart quickened. These girls were in serious trouble. Hours after we received the email, Laura left a voice mail on our home phone explaining in broken English the problem of prostitution in her work environment. It was clear we needed to rescue Laura and Irina from potential danger. I sent an email saying my husband and I would come get them. Just as we were leaving our home, Laura replied with the address of an apartment where they were staying with girls who had taken them in for the night. We left our home in Lynchburg, VA, at 12:30 a.m. and drove 330 miles to Ocean City, MD, praying the Lord would protect the girls until we arrived.

All was quiet on the streets of Ocean City when we arrived at 6:30 the next morning. Young men from other countries silently gathered trash from the sidewalks, preparing the city for another busy day. A lone businessman standing outside his bicycle shop confirmed foreign students were staying in the upstairs apartment by his store. We saw a small Kazakh flag posted on a window and knew we had found the right place.

My firm knock on the door of the apartment awakened Laura. When she opened the door I said, "We've come to take you home with us. Tell Irina we are here. We'll wait outside while you gather your things."

And so began our unexpected summer journey with two girls from

Kazakhstan who barely knew us. The Lord immediately put a special mother's love in my heart for Laura and Irina. Instead of helping them find an apartment, we invited them to live with us. My heart said, "Take this opportunity to love these girls and enjoy the privilege of shaping their young lives." I committed to turning a near tragic experience into a chance of a lifetime for these precious young girls.



### **The Lord immediately put a special mother's love in my heart...**

The comfort the Lord All-Powerful offered to the prophet Jeremiah held true for Laura and Irina. "I know what I am planning for you. I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future. Then you will call My name. You will come to Me and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will search for Me. And when you search for Me with all your heart, you will find Me."

God allowed my husband and me to be part of His good plans for Laura and Irina. A week after they arrived in our home, they began working in the housekeeping department of the Christian university where my husband teaches. The building they were assigned to clean was the

new auditorium for our church. God brought these two unsaved girls 7,000 miles from home to give them a job where they were in church every day of the week. They were surrounded by Christian people who showed God's love to them.

By the end of the summer, Laura and Irina did call on God's name. They prayed to Him in their Russian language and He heard their prayer for salvation. They came to America not knowing what they were really searching for and they found the Lord.

The motel where Laura was assigned to work is currently under investigation by the FBI for charges of holding 22 young girls as indentured servants. These girls are paid low wages for their work and threatened with their lives if they try to escape their crowded living conditions.

While I am grateful Laura was kept from that fate, my heart is broken to think of the girls who were caught in the schemes of evil men.

After four months, Laura and Irina returned to their homes in Kazakhstan. They are growing in the ways of the Lord as they participate in group Bible study and fellowship with other believers. Although their departure from our home left an emptiness, our hearts rejoice that one day we will share the joys of Heaven with our Kazakh daughters who are now part of the family of God.

*Beth Whaley and her husband, Vernon, live in Lynchburg, VA. They are members of Thomas Road Baptist Church where she is active in Women's Bible Study and Choir Care Group Ministry. A registered nurse, Beth is the daughter of former FWBIM director, Rolla Smith. The Whaleys are returning to Kazakhstan with a mission team in May 2007.*