My Name is Aunt

(This is the Aunt T_____ mentioned in last month's Sister's story, My Name is Helper.)

I once lived in Russia, and as with all people there who do not know Jesus, my life was just work. One horrible day, my husband and my only child, a little daughter, died in a car accident. I was taken to the hospital with severe injuries and given little chance of recovery, but God brought me back to life. I had lost my family and I could not bear the grief. Once I was released from the hospital, I began to drink heavily. Of course it did not help me to forget my sorrow. It gave me no peace. I moved to Tajikistan and wanted to hide from my grief. But I drank even more.

My drinking led to a conviction for a crime: I was sentenced to 10 years in prison for murder. When I had been there three years, I began to visit the prayer room. In 1998, I became a Christian. In 2002, God gave me freedom—three years before my sentence was over. I was baptized and moved to a rehabilitation center for women.

I got to know Victor, a five-time convicted criminal who was deathly ill and was released from prison to die. Victor also heard of Jesus in the prison and became a child of God. We were married and prayed to God that He would show us the place where we could serve Him.

One day, our path led us to a town bordering Afghanistan. We saw the many mosques, devout Muslims, but also the countless children on the streets. Women looked dull on the dusty road, pulling their handcarts behind them and then trying to sell their goods. Since that moment we knew that this was the place where God wanted us to serve Him. We moved into a small, old house where a missionary had once lived before he had to leave the city.

We got to know a handful of Christians and started a home Bible study. We visited the neighbors and got to know the salesmen at the market. We would ask them who gives us hope for our lives. Two years later our congregation numbered 10 adults. However, our main concern was and still is the children who wander so aimlessly through the streets. We invited them to our home, gave them water to wash and clean clothes to wear, then offered them something to eat. The kids did not want to go away because at home they expected abuse and mistreatment by drunken mothers. Most fathers are out of country looking for work and are often missing for years.

We saw this need and began to take care of these neglected children. Some were brought to our house by parents who were unable to raise their own children. One lady brought three of her grandchildren when she could no longer take care of them. Her husband is blind and cannot work and the children's mother went abroad in search of work and became seriously ill. Other children come by themselves as orphans. One day one boy prayed, "Thank you, Jesus, that there is such a place where Your people live.

Otherwise I would not know where I would end up. Actually, I know do know—at a dump, but what I do not know is which one." Another five-year-old boy brought two more children—"his friends from the old life.“ All three lived at the dump.

We try to give the children a structured daily routine. The teens come to us straight from school. Victor takes over the school work and cleaning of uniforms and I take care of lunch. My husband works as a truck driver at the market and earns enough money to afford soup and pita bread only. Other Christians saw this service and support us with their gifts. Every day there are more than 20 children in our house.

After lunch, we divide the children into three groups and do Bible study with all of them. The teens, as well as Victor and I, are enrolled in the Bible School. And so they learn the Bible every day with the help of correspondence courses under our supervision. The little ones get pictures of Bible stories to color. For the middle group, we use the teaching material from Sunday school. The Bible has become the most important book of our lives. We encourage all the children to memorize Bible verses and whole sections of Scripture and recite them by heart. Last year, they were very busy and were able to put their knowledge to the test in a Bible competition. The best were allowed to go to the capital city to take part in a national Bible competition.

The homework from school is not neglected. We help the kids with their questions and problems, so most children make good progress. Victor, once an orphan himself, graduated from school with honors. All teachers in the school know my phone number and contact me if the children do not appear in the school.

Before dinner, we all have plenty of time to learn practical things in the house. Victor and the guys do work outside the house, and I teach the girls the necessary things in the home. My training as a cook helps me a lot. After dinner, most children go home. Some are afraid of beatings and ill-treatment of adults, and seek shelter in our house and stay with us. One 11 year old boy lives with us because his mother found a new boyfriend who chased him out of the house.

God is faithful. He blesses our ministry to the children. Initially, our neighbors were very skeptical towards us and asked themselves, "What does this strange childless couple do with children in their home?" Once the police came and wanted to prohibit children from coming to us. But the same "skeptical" neighbors defended us and shouted to the police, “What are you doing here? Should these children continue to destroy our houses, breaking your windows and stealing? Let them be here in the house where they do no harm, so at least our homes remain safe!" We thanked God for the preservation and new friends from the neighborhood.

Our little old house has become a Hope Center. Christians from the USA and Germany came in the summer of 2013, and we built a new house. God gave us His grace and richly endowed us with everything we need to live and to serve.