



Letter # 16 December 2004

Merry Christmas from the Mannas

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To our dear friends and family,

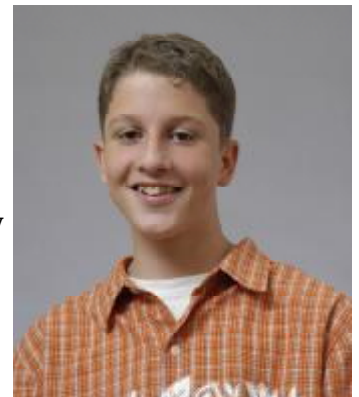
We wish you our very warmest “Merry Christmas!” from Ukraine, even though it’s not a very warm day in Ukraine. It’s thickly cloud-covered and therefore very dim outside—normal winter weather in Kiev. But our spirits are bright this Christmas season. Praise God!! As I write you today, we are going into our 3rd Christmas season in Ukraine. So far, Christmas has been the most difficult time of each year here. The first year, Mike was going through major culture shock and serious problems with his pancreas. Last year, we had just had our second flood and though we tried, it was very difficult to create a warm and cozy holiday atmosphere amidst a stark living room that contained only a couch and a Christmas tree. We’ve always felt so separate and “foreign” and so FAR away from home at Christmastime. This year we have a cozy home, comfy furniture, and our tree is up and decorated. Last night we had a candlelight supper in our kitchen and sang Christmas carols together afterwards. As I write this, soft Christmas music is playing on the stereo, and I’m typing beside a hot cup of tea.

Mike is at work. We are enclosing a brochure from our seminary that gives a good report of the youth ministry major that he has implemented there. This year Mike has been able to go much deeper with his students. He’s had a weekly discussion and prayer time with them as a group, and he’s been able to visit and observe several of them in their hands-on ministries in the churches they attend. It’s been fun to see the love and trust grow between Mike and his students. He’s gone beyond only teaching them in the classroom. Mike’s staff includes Lena and Oksana. It is a privilege to be part of their lives as well. Oksana is expecting a baby boy in February, and Lena will be getting married in May. Lena has asked Sammie to be one of her flower girls, along with her 9 yr. old niece, Natasha.



The kids will be arriving home from school in a few minutes, hoping for an after-school snack. I think I’ll surprise them with a carefully rationed cup of American hot chocolate with an equally special marshmallow floating on top. How Mike and I treasure these years where our home is filled with the happy chatter of our children! Mandie is at the age of enjoying an intimate talk about that increasingly interesting subject of boys. We enjoy a few of these chats in the warmth of her cozy bed at night. Sometimes we hop in with Dad to get his advice. We’re proud of Mandie’s choices because they are guided by Jesus.

Luke just turned 13. He, too, has a strong commitment to the Lord. We greatly enjoy his fun spirit and the laughter that he brings to the dinner table. Luke is an affectionate boy with a very kind heart. He lavishes a lot of love on us, still keeping the promise he made as a 5 yr. old to never be ashamed of hugging us in public. Luke is also really smart. He must take after his dad.





Sammie loves to play. She must take after her mom. **J** Unfortunately, this sometimes shows in her grades, but we're thankful for her happy, carefree spirit. As soon as Sammie gets an A on a Bible test, an A on a History test, and an A on a Science test, Mike has promised to find a stable and take her horseback riding. At first, he said that Mommy would take her. Sammie objected saying, "No, Daddy. You should be the one to take me. Going horseback riding will be a sacrifice for *you*, just like it will be a sacrifice for *me* to get A's." Mike slowly smiled and agreed. **J** Sammie has a sweet, sensitive heart and a growing love for Jesus.

As for me, my days are full and generally happy. I attend language school three times a week and often haul groceries home from the outdoor market or grocery store. I do lots of cooking and cleaning and hang piles of laundry (no dryer). I help with homework, do my own Russian homework, and attend many sporting events. I love being a wife and mom, and I even like being a language student. It's very rewarding to communicate, albeit roughly.

It's been exciting for us that so many of you have seen our home on TV recently during this "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine. We've enjoyed lots of e-mails from concerned friends. There was nearly one million demonstrators on the main street downtown following the fraudulent elections on November 30th. We have never seen so many people in one place!! Here is a picture of us on Khreshatyk in a place where we actually had room to take a picture. Check out our web site (www.youthdiscipler.com) to see more pictures and a few video clips. The protest has remained peaceful. There has actually been a fun, party atmosphere as the Ukrainian people have banded together to fight the corruption in their government. There is an old Ukrainian saying, "My hut is on the edge of the village; I don't (want) to know anything." So this uprising has surprised everyone. People are now chanting, "We are many, and we won't be defeated," as well as "Freedom cannot be stopped." We are witnessing a piece of history in the making! The elections will be re-held on December 26th. Please pray for truth to prevail and for peace in Ukraine.



We are sinking our roots deeper into the fertile soil of Ukraine, and we have many of you to thank. We've been open about our adjustments here, and you have encouraged us and prayed for us. God has provided our financial support through many of you. We thank you. It has become an honor to be here. We often pray that God would bless you abundantly. He knows each of you completely. He knows each of your needs. He knows what is best for you. In our prayers for you, we pray that you will continually walk with the Lord and worship Him with your lives. Christmas is a time to remember and worship. Sit down with a hot cup of coffee or tea and reflect on the fulfillment of God's promise to send One who would have power and authority to redeem us from our sin -- the sinless Messiah, His Son, Jesus.

We love you so much. Merry Christmas!

With a big family hug,
Judy for Mike, Mandie, Luke and Sammie

