

\*Prayer\*

Hi, my name is Bonnie Ledford and this is my daughter Anya. She joined our family through adoption from Ukraine last November. We are here tonight to share with you a little of her story and how the Lord has impacted her life and many others through the ministry of the Open Arms team. I'm sure you would not be here if not to support them and enjoy great Ukrainian food! I would like to give you a personal insight into how much their ministry matters.

I first met my daughter in the summer of 2013 when she came to us through an international hosting program. Several charitable organizations that work in Ukraine have programs through which you can invite a kid from an orphanage into your home for the summer or Christmas and give them a chance to be in a family and out of an institution. The Lord put it on my husband's heart to host a teen girl when we saw a presentation at our church that included some startling statistics about how the kids "graduate" from the orphanage at 16 and how the girls have a 75% chance of ending up in prostitution or committing suicide. The statistics were even worse for boys: 90% turn to crime or commit suicide. When it was put right before us, we couldn't turn away.

So Anya came to stay with us, speaking almost no English, but a keen observer of how things work wherever she is. We got to know each other and she was forever implanted in our hearts. When the time came to send her back to the orphanage at the end of the summer, we were heartbroken. We did not know yet if we could adopt her, but more than anything we wanted her to know about Christ. We told her in any way we could and sent her to every Russian church camp in our area. Mostly I prayed. Prayed that God would send people to her orphanage to show her His love for her, to share the gospel with her. Little did I know He already had, before I even asked! Several of them are sitting before you tonight.

We continued to pray and had Anya come back at Christmas of 2013. God confirmed it and we started the process to adopt. It is a long, difficult, and expensive process, obviously, completely worth it! But because it is so difficult, only a few kids out of the estimated 90,000 orphans in Ukraine will get adopted. Even fewer teenagers. As I said earlier, they graduate from the orphanage at 16 or 17 and are out on their own. The government pays for them to go to trade school and gives them a small living stipend. They have a poor education, no life skills, and no deep family connections like so many of us are blessed with. They are alone in the world. Yet their Heavenly Father sees them. And He sends His servants to care for them.

The team at Open Arms seeks to build relationships with the kids starting with their time in the orphanage and continuing especially through their life after graduation when they are out on their own. Anya knows Anika, Melissa, Chelsea, and Sasha from the summer camps they did at her orphanage ( a LONG drive on a very bumpy country road from the city of Sumy!) The earliest pictures I have of her are from the camps they did at the Pravdinska orphanage. They were the ones who taught her to pray, who showed her unconditional love and true faith in God

lived out, before He even brought her into our family. He used them to prepare her heart to be loved by our family, and to accept His love for her.

I had the privilege of meeting these four when I was in Ukraine last November for her adoption. I got to see them at the orphanage, able to speak to the kids in Ukrainian when I couldn't and reach out to them in ways that I longed to. They opened their home and lives to me when I was in Sumy waiting for Anya's final documents so we could go home. They also open their home and lives to a young unwed mom and many other older kids who have no one else. They are literally standing in the gap, showing these kids the way to Christ when they believe they have no value. There are kids I have in my mind right now, friends of Anya's who haven't been adopted but will be out on their own this fall, having graduated from the orphanage. Their future prospects are dismal. But then I remember that I serve a God who will not abandon the fatherless, and who has sent His servants from California all the way to Sumy, Ukraine, just to point these kids to Him and sacrificially show them His love. Please join me in supporting them in prayer and financially as you are able. May God bless you abundantly!