

A Tale of Two Orphans

I first saw Andrew in 1991. I was upstairs in the most Godforsaken orphanage I had ever seen.

Downstairs were depressing rooms crammed with metal cribs. In each crib was one or two babies or toddlers. Each bed was totally absent of toys, pillows or even blankets. The room was gray, unbearably warm, and the smell of urine and feces hung like a cloud over the children.

Not one child wore a diaper, held a bottle, showed any sign of care. The infants lay listless while most of the toddlers stood, each in their own “cage”.

With no one to hold them and nothing to play with, they hung onto the sides of their cribs, rocking back and forth with all of their might. The metal railings clanged nosily as they banged into each other, but it was as close to being rocked as the children would ever know.

I had left those rooms and climbed the stairs, hoping the conditions would be better; but it was more of the same. Again I found rows and rows of the saddest children—hungry, dirty, neglected, abandoned.

In the midst of this sea of tiny faces was one that captured my heart in a way I cannot explain. He was 3 years old, with piecing blue eyes, wearing a tattered green shirt and nothing else. His belly was distended from lack of food, his tiny legs so frail I wondered how he held himself up. As I looked at him, the same clamber of cribs crashing together rattled my brain; the same overpowering smells caused me to gasp.

But none of this mattered in that moment. That one face, that one child, had my total, undivided attention. Andrew. As I looked in his eyes, God said to my heart, “This is your son.”

I first saw Natalie in 2007. I walked out of another orphanage to another heartbreaking sight: 18 orphan girls were lined up on a blue metal bench outside the capital of Moldova. They were all 16 years old; they would all be put out on the street the following day.

With a ninth-grade education, no family and no place to live, they were prime targets for sex traffickers—in fact the underworld knew the very places they would pass through in the coming hours. Each girl looked more frightened than the next. Each was thin, pale, dressed in discarded clothing and ill-fitting shoes.

My eyes filled with tears as I looked down the line of girls. There were 18. I had a home for “aged out” orphan girls like this called Stella’s House, but there was only room for three more beds. Eighteen girls. Three beds. How could I possibly pick? Finally, I asked the girls of Stella’s House to choose for me. One of the girls they chose was Natalie.

Natalie had been dumped at the orphanage when she was 9 years old. Every Saturday since then, she had waited at the brown gate to get the first glimpse of her mother coming to visit. Her mother never came. Finally Natalie learned her mother had been on the grounds the day before with her new boyfriend to see his children, but had not bothered to see her own daughter.

Andrew, the neglected orphan boy and Natalie, the abandoned orphan girl, became husband and wife recently under the light of the pale, blue moon.

Weddings are always special events. Jesus used that very setting to perform His first miracle, and as incredible as that story must have been at the time, this miracle to me is even greater.

You see, Andrew is not just my son; he is also one of the most amazing young men of God I have ever seen. Though he has no

memory of being an orphan himself, he traveled with me from the time he was little to orphanages in Moldova.

From the time he could carry a hammer Andrew helped me do repairs. When he had a lap big enough to hold another child, he comforted children. For years he passed out Christmas boxes, fed "sweeties" to little ones and showered them with love.

Perhaps even more precious was how he dealt with his own missed birthday parties and sporting events by a father that was so often away helping other children, preaching the gospel, or raising money to care for other orphans. I was absent so much, but he always understood.

Now he is a prominent spokesman for the ministry. He shares in churches, schools, anywhere that will have him. He tells of the amazing love of God, and the difference each one of us can have for the Gospel sake. When he speaks, people listen knowing where he came from. His words are more impactful. He changes lives.

And Natalie, dear, sweet Natalie. She came to Stella's House and lived first as one of 25 orphan girls. For years before we'd met her, she'd prayed to a God she didn't know. Suddenly she was surrounded by other girls who knew Him as their personal Savior.

These girls welcomed her into their family and showered her with love, opening her heart to know Jesus. From the beginning, it was easy to see God had His hand on this girl. She grew to become one of the most powerful speakers of our group, the anointing of God clearly on her life.

When the orphans started a church at Stella's House, she assumed a leadership role, leading worship, praying with the lost, inviting her friends and loved ones to "come and meet a Man."

As I write these words, this special couple is on their honeymoon, basking in the love that He has given them. When they return, a new chapter in their lives and ministry will begin. Pray for them and the lives they will touch as He continues to bless them and use their yielded lives for His Glory.