

SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

A HARVEST IN POLAND: MARIA'S STORY
FEATURE STORY ASSIGNMENT

SUBMITTED TO DR. LUCIAN COLEMAN
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE
WRITING FOR PUBLICATION
CMMAR 320

STEVEN D. REECE
NOVEMBER 19, 1993

MARIA'S STORY

The smell of freshly plowed earth fills the air. Nostrils flair and chains clatter as a horse struggles to pull a plow across a potato field in Poland. A farmer gently cries out to the animal to keep going, while his strong hands guide the plow as it loosens the soil around the tender plants. The soil is good. The seed is good. With a lot of work, the farmer will reap a good harvest. And one day, he will rejoice.

Christians have labored in Poland, like that farmer.

Just as the farmer expects a harvest, so do they. Today Poland is seeing that harvest. Years of communist oppression and religious tradition have not stopped the sowing of the seed of the Gospel. Now we see a harvest of souls. Maria Melko is one of those souls.

Maria is a mother of three grown children. She and her husband, Czeslow, share a fifth floor apartment with their 20 year old daughter, Agnieszka in Lublin, in southeast Poland.

In spite of being controlled by a communist government for 45 years, Poland is a country that is deeply religious. Ninety percent of Poland's 38 million people are Roman Catholic. Pope John Paul II is from Poland. The Catholic influence in Poland is seen from road-side shrines to majestic cathedrals. According to the National and International Religion Report, Poland leads the world in church attendance. Maria was born into this world. But something was missing.

Maria said, "I felt empty. I searched for meaning in my religion but I found nothing. I began to look for meaning in other religions, mainly the cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses. But I was not satisfied." She is not alone.

"Cults are everywhere" in Eastern Europe, says Daryl McCarthy, executive director of the International Institute for Christian Studies in an article from Christianity Today. "The people are ready to accept some form of religion. The only question is, What religion will they follow?"

The Moonies or Hare Krishnas? The Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons?"

Maria's search continued until one day in 1990 she saw an advertisement in the local paper inviting people to come to the Baptist Church in Lublin. She said, "I thought that maybe this church had the answer. I went to this church and heard God's Word for the first time. I was deeply convicted of my sin by the words the pastor spoke and I knew that I needed Jesus."

"After I went to this church every Sunday for about a year, I asked Jesus to come into my heart and I was saved. I knew that I found what I had been searching for all of my life. I was hungry and thirsty and I found Jesus. That night I claimed God's promise to the Philipian Jailer in the Book of Acts and I asked God to save me and my whole house." She said. God began to move in the hearts of her family.

In 1991, she was baptized. On a winter's day following her baptism, she was walking home from church and slipped on some ice and twisted her ankle. It was so severe that she could not walk and she wasn't able to go to church on her own. So, she asked her husband, Czeslow if he would take her by car. He did.

"I didn't want to go in the first time I took her. I just wanted to stay in the car and wait." He said. "But Maria asked me again the next time and I went in with her. For the next five months, I began to participate in the meetings with my wife. I began to read the New Testament and joined in the Bible studies the pastor conducted in our home. During one of these meetings, I received Jesus and I was baptized three months later." He said.

God began to move in the lives of other family members. After Maria twisted her ankle, she had to have surgery and she asked her daughter, Agnieszka to walk with her to church at night. Agnieszka said, "I met some fine people at the church but I wasn't interested in Jesus. My

mother asked me to continue to go with her because she did not want to go alone. I couldn't refuse my mom. The sermons didn't speak to me as much as the songs did. The words were too strong for me and I felt that my ears would break."

"It was in the words that I saw that I was guilty before God and that I was a sinner. I started to attend the Bible studies at home with my parents. Then during one meeting, I received Jesus the same night as my father. I was totally different. Before I received Jesus, I was very nervous and after I received Him, I had peace. It is impossible to say in such a few words how different my life is but I can't describe it....I received a new life. All the old went away and now everything is new." She said.

"This was unusual." Czeslow said. "First Maria, then me and Agnieszka, it was like a chain pulling our family members into heaven. By June of 1993, there were thirteen of our family members who had come to Jesus." But there have been conflicts within the family as well since their decision to follow Jesus.

Their oldest daughter, Ewa no longer speaks to them. This is hard and Maria prays that God will soften her heart and bring her to Jesus. Their son Marek started a war with them. He wanted to prove to them that they were wrong and that the Bible was a lie. He set out to show them that the Catholic Church was right; so, he began to read the Bible. "He discovered that the Bible was true and he received Jesus and was baptized. He wanted to change their minds but God changed his mind," Agnieszka said.

Marek and his wife Viola, have a one-year-old daughter. There is a battle raging between Marek, his wife and his in-laws as to how Kasia will be raised. Czeslow and Maria are trying to make peace with their son's, in-laws by living Christ-like lives and sharing Jesus with them.

The father-in-law is the most opposed. At Kasia's first birthday party, Maria and Czeslow had a discussion with him about Catholics and Baptists. He has no desire to read the Bible or receive Jesus. "I don't want to change my faith. I don't want to change the faith or tradition of my parents, grandparents or those who went before me. Czeslow will not teach me anything about the Bible because I have finished the university and I am wise enough to understand it on my own. He will not teach me." He said.

A Polish Baptist pastor said in a December 1982 Commission Magazine article, "many people in Poland look for something new. They look for a place to stand. Scripture gives you a good place to stand, a solid foundation." Maria found that place to stand.

Maria expects God to reap the harvest from the seeds of the Gospel He planted in her family. It was good soil. It was good seed. And one day like that Polish potato farmer she will rejoice, when the harvest is in.

--30--