

In the Hands of God - Part 1

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Gerti (far right), who always brought an uplifting warmth wherever she went, joins Dr. Hugh Spurgin at a small celebration in Bulgaria.

I had a deep relationship with God before I joined the Unification Church. I had wanted to become a missionary since I was five years old -although I didn't know exactly what a missionary was or did, I recognized missionaries as special people. When I was sixteen years old, I wanted to comfort God as I felt He must be in so much pain because of this sinful world. This understanding led me to many deep experiences with God where I cried every day for many hours because of God's suffering: Once while listening to the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, I was lying in bed with open eyes and had a very exact vision: I was searching for the Messiah among all the people in Vienna, but he wasn't there. So, I went up into the sky to see where he was. I had the intuitive feeling that he was in the East.

Looking to the east, I saw Hungary; going higher in the sky, I saw Turkey, then India. Going still higher, I saw a pyramid. The pyramid was made of people standing on each other's shoulders. All the people on the earth were in Korea, so there was not enough room for everyone, so people had to stand on top of one another. Then one man, standing on the top of the pyramid, was in the clouds because the pyramid was so high.

I joined in Austria in 1973. Although I had many spiritual experiences with God before I joined the Church, when I went to Bulgaria it became much deeper.

Historical parallels

My mission to Bulgaria was quite by accident and this fact ties in with the history of Bulgaria, for the same situation happened 100 years ago with the king of Bulgaria. He also became king of Bulgaria quite by accident. He, like me, was from Austria and didn't even know Bulgaria's native language.

After 500 years of Turkish occupation, Bulgaria was liberated in 1878. The first king was German, but he left after a while. After that, a Bulgarian delegation searched all over Europe because they had no king and no tradition. Finally, they found their new king in a casino in Vienna where members of the military frequently played. He was an officer, but of a royal lineage of Hessian kings and only waiting to become a king. He was a little bit drunk when the Bulgarian delegation approached him. Until they met this officer, no one was ready to go to such a country as Bulgaria. He remained the king until the communists came.

Toward the end of 1979, there was a 40-day workshop in Austria. During the last few days of the workshop, Peter Koch asked who wanted to be a missionary behind the Iron Curtain. Many of us volunteered. Everyone wanted to go to Russia because it was a well-known country, or Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. So, I decided I wanted to go to a country that no one had chosen. Filled with the love of God I answered, "Yes, I want to go to Bulgaria which no one has chosen."

Every missionary knew that they might be killed if they were not careful. We were warned that the conditions were so bad spiritually that we might go to prison, die or be killed by the communists. I knew a missionary in Russia who was shot and killed by communist officials. We clearly knew of the danger involved, but we voluntarily went on this mission.

Before the matching, I was alone in Munich, Germany to prepare myself for Bulgaria. One day I heard beautiful music on the radio and had a deep experience with Jesus. I felt that Jesus was terribly sad that he had no bride. I felt his sadness so deeply, that I cried. I prayed for one hour and made a promise to God, saying, "When I am matched and blessed to someone in the future, I will unconditionally receive my wife from the Messiah. I only ask one thing: that my spouse must be such a wife with whom we can fulfill Your Will." I knew some wives and husbands are only half-heartedly serving True Parents—they live their own lives, isolated from the church. I didn't want to become such a person. I wanted a wife with whom I could fulfill the Will of God.

In June of 1981, I was matched by picture with Gerti Persch. Gerti was this person, even though in the beginning it seemed just the opposite, because she felt unworthy of the Blessing and the mission. But I had faith in her that she would overcome, and she became stronger than me. To secure my ability to continue my "secret" mission, I had to remain free of any public association with the church. So Gerti alone attended our Blessing in October 1982, representing both of us. I entered Bulgaria in 1982, working as a lecturer at the University of Sofia, in the capital of my nation.

The first three years in Bulgaria were a time of deep spiritual relationship with God. Although I had been given the mission years earlier, I was only able to enter after two years of preparation. In the beginning, everything was very quiet; I was in the underground. I had to be very careful, making many prayer and fasting conditions. I experienced God very deeply among the people. I did everything without speaking, for I never knew who was listening to what I was saying. Spies were all over Bulgaria and all the communist countries. Normally, every citizen of a communist country has to report to the police when he has contact with a foreigner. This was also a law in Bulgaria, which had a special mission to train KGB agents.

Nonetheless, I got to know many good people, teaching three of them the Divine Principle and about Father. It was very difficult to guide them because everything was underground and they were afraid.

In August 1986, Gerti came to Bulgaria and we started our family life. Suddenly, everything became more substantial: we started Sunday Service, we did pledge, and members became more confident. In July of 1988, our first child, a daughter, was born. Thus, both internally and externally, our life went from the spiritual foundation to becoming more substantial.

There were peaceful moments in our first few years as husband and wife. Once when I laid my head on her lap, I mentioned to her, "I'm thinking of the Bible passage where Jesus said,

'The Son of Man has no place to lay his head.' I feel Jesus didn't mean that literally, but that he wanted someplace where he could feel at home. This is exactly the feeling that I have now." I always felt so near to Jesus.

A gnawing question

Each summer, we went to Italy to fundraise. And every year as we returned to Bulgaria, I had the feeling that I or someone else would die. It was a sickening feeling. I explained it to Gerti, who just listened, and then by her presence and her support these feelings would subside. But one summer night, on my way home, God asked me what I would be willing to offer as a sacrifice should it be necessary. The first time this question came, it was so awful I didn't even want to think about it. But God asked again, "What will you offer? It should not be something that you don't need; because this is not an offering. It should be the best and what you love the most."