

## *A Memoir From Kleban the Family*

I wanted to share my story. Especially, to share Gods love for people.

Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

How we defeat the enemy is by sharing what happened to my family.

Our government reassured us that nobody was going to attack. Our president reassured us, and we trusted. Even though now, they admit that they knew what was going to happen.

We were prepping for a big boxing tournament coming up. I worked as a trainer in my town. I trained my son, he was the champion of Kiev in boxing. The tournament was supposed to begin February 24th.

February 23rd, after we had gone to bed, I received a message from the other trainers that the tournament was canceled. One of the biggest tournaments of the year. We were preparing for it for 6 months. When I told my son about it, he was very disappointed.

I awoke at 5am to my wife saying "Everything is ok". At first I thought she was just running late to work, but I saw that she was talking to somebody on the phone and telling them. She told them "Get the kids, come quickly to us." Then she said "Russians began gunfire in Kiev. She was telling her sister to come to us. I told my wife to also call my sister as well to come to us. My sister came with her two daughters and husband. That day we planned to leave town and go to the border. When I went to put gas in the car, the line was backed up 2 kilometers, over a mile. We waited in line and when we got halfway up the line, the gas ran out. So, we were unable to leave town. We then started seeing saw convoys of military vehicles coming through town. We couldn't believe what we were seeing. How can this be real? We were able to grab a few groceries that were left at the grocery store and went home. There was almost nothing left in the stores at this point, we were lucky to get what we did.

When we got home, we began normal life with now 9 people living together. My family and my sister's family together. A night we still little had electricity and news went in and out. At night we heard the first loud bombs. All the bridges surrounding our town were bombed by our own military to try to block Russian troops. But we found ourselves surrounded by Russian soldiers and we were stuck unable to leave. 3 kilometers from our house, gunfire began.

This was the first time I saw such a red sky at night from the bombings in the neighboring town. In the morning we came outside and half a mile away we saw three Ukrainian tanks shooting towards Russians. Within an hour we saw the three tanks blown up. We all witnessed this, even our children. That day we saw Russian planes fly 30 meters about us carrying bombs and missiles to bomb my hometown.

They also bombed near Chernobyl which caused a nuclear reactor leak that both Russian and Ukraine had to work together to stop so that there wouldn't be a world disaster.

Our house had power for three days. We watched news and we had internet. I kept in contact with the other boxing trainers through messenger and kept them updated on what we saw. Like when we would see planes flying to Kiev. So the trainers in Kiev were able to relay the message to others there. All of those messages and communication were kept in in my phone.

After three days we lost contact with the outside world. We had no internet and no electricity, it was all gone. We had a store 2 miles away from our house. But if people tried to go to the store, Russian soldiers would shoot them. People would jump out of their cars and run to the woods. Women, children, men all would get shot.

After a week, people's food and water was ending. One of the pastors loaded up his car with bread and water and started to drive it to those in need. He was shot by the Russian soldiers and his body was dragged to the ditch. No one was allowed to move him.

The Russian soldiers were everywhere, but not on our block. They were everywhere but not by our home. God protected us like in a dome.

We ate twice a day; the kids ate three times a day. We made a watery soup and also gave the kids a candy to curb their appetite. We had a wood burning stove that we could cook on. We had some potatoes and barley, but we were running out.

We had no news about what was happening.

One week in.

We had no light. We would charge our phones using the car and then use our phones in the dark, it was getting dark at 4pm. We also had blankets covering the windows so that soldiers and the drones couldn't see that people were there, otherwise we would have been shot at or bombs would have been dropped. If people had lights in houses they would be shot.

In those moments, we hoped and waited for someone to come get us out, but no one came.

I found a radio and listened to the broadcast. We could hear some news of what was happening in the country, so during the day I would walk to the neighbors and let them know. If people tried to leave our town, they were shot.

My family and I all slept huddled together. I held my two-year-old son. He was hungry. That was one of the hardest fears I had, was not to be able to feed my children. Where would we get food? We had money, but it was no value to get us food. That fear for my kids and starvation made my faith diminish and felt paralyzing.

(Like the story of Abraham and Sara in the Bible. Sara had such fear and loss of faith in God's promise, that she had her slave have a son with her husband. Out of fear became two nations and a catastrophe.)

I then realized "I am a Christian! I have prayer! I have all the weapons to save my family!"

I remember telling my wife "I'm going to change" I turned on my inner self.

In the morning, I woke up and began to fast. It was cold and winter. I would go outside to pray, to be alone with God. I went outside and prayed for hours. I could hear bombing and planes. I just walked and prayed. I did this for three days. Until I heard an answer from God. "I will take you out of here."

I also prayed for all of my family because all I heard was "I will save YOU" so I prayed that I need all my family.

When I let that in, my fear went away. I had peace. Only now I can say what it is to be with the Holy Spirit.

I am a simple logical person, I assumed the path would just open for us. Not now I understand how Gods greatness was shown. How it actually happened , and not by accident but by Him.

My sister and her husband said “We just need to go for it”, but we had the fear of the shooting.

Again, I fasted, but I had no answer. But I got peace.

I didn't know it at the time, nut my sister also fasted unknowingly at different times than me.

So one day we got in the car and started our journey. Fist we made a big paper and made a red cross on it and taped it to our car windows. And another paper that read “CHILDREN”. We did not have much gas since we couldn't get any. Only by a miracle our car kept going. In theory, the car was not supposed to make it. The day we left, the bombing and shooting was so strong it shook the walls.

We drove 12 miles and turned into the woods to avoid danger.

At any time we could of, and should have been shot. The towns were destroyed. There were no civilians, only weapons laying around. It was terrible to see the destruction. We realized while we were driving, that we had nothing, nothing that protected us. We were out in the open. In that moment, started to say out loud Psalm 24 and Psalm 90. Over and over. That gave us peace. We heard gun shooting. It was terrifying. But reciting the Psalms gave us peace.

My sister and her family in the other car were also reciting the same verse. Having our own words didn't help, only Gods word! Only the Psalm.

We didn't know the exact direction through the wood. We were just told by others vague directions, “go to a village and turn”. When we got to the village, I got out of the car at an intersection to try to figure out where to go. I had stepped a few feet form the car when I hear a gun shot 10 Meters by me. I ran quickly and got back into my car. As soon as I sat, I immediately saw a sniper walk out, holding us in his sight. Behind him came a tank with soldiers with white wraps on their arms. We lifted our hands to show we were unarmed. We were told to exit the car. We didn't know if these were Russian or Ukrainian soldiers. Our kids also got out of the cars, holding their hands up and started crying.

The sniper said “Don't be scared, we are here to save you.” They were Russian soldiers. They asked us where we were going. We told them we had no food and needed to get some. They told us not to go to a town because there were “Ukrainian soldiers killing civilians.” But we knew that they were lying to us. My sisters husband and I talked to the soldiers and heard on their radio “Don't shoot at them” We saw that behind us were 4 tanks lowering their guns. In that moment we were no important to them. The tanks said that they were going to another town to shoot all the houses and people. I asked why, and they said “because they are Ukrainians.”

We were probably let go because they were busy to shoot others and not us.

We were let go and we kept driving for 3 hours through the woods. God let us out.

If those soldiers that stopped us checked our phones, they would have found the communications and messages we had with people in Kiev and we would have been shot.

We drove out of the woods and saw Ukrainian soldiers and Ukrainian flags. We can't tell you our joy that overcame us. I tried to give them money but they saw that we had kids and said that we needed it more and that they were just protecting their country.

We stayed at the border hosted by a church. When we went to the church service there, we all just cried.

After we made it, another family had heard that we were successful. They tried to leave as well but were all shot in their car. The next family, a wife and a small child, tried to go through the woods but drove over a mine that blew them up.

After we had left our town, the Russian army took over and people were forced to live in their basements.

We went through Germany and then filled out Visas to Canada.

We learned this year to trust God so much.

1. God always has plans for us. We can imagine them, even if we don't understand, His plans are what is best for us, we are meant to be right where we are.
2. We need to fully trust God. He knows what is best for us, everything will be how we need it.

*Trust God without ending.*

If you told me a year ago that I would be here in Have, Mt, I wouldn't have believe them. I want people to see God's grace from our faces. I want people to see what God did for my family. For all of Ukraine, the first line in their anthem sounds strong-

*"Ukraine has not died"*