

# *Love can follow any fall*

D. A. Sharpe

This is another quarterly story for genealogical purposes to demonstrate how stories in one's life can be captured in writing for passing down to your children, grandchildren, and to even more family and friends who are interested. It has been a privilege for Suzanne and me to cross paths with a number of publicly and nationally known events in our lives, and it's wonderful to share them with you.

The fall of the Berlin wall on November 9, 1989 was the beginning of the demise of major Communistic domination in the world at that time. It was on July 12, 1987 that U.S. President Ronald Reagan, in a fiery speech in Berlin, West Germany, uttered those now famous words, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" It did come down slightly over two years later, and freedom began to spread over eastern Europe in nations that had been locked into government-crushing control since the wall was erected in 1961.

Freedom loving people in the United States and in many places over the world began a sustained season of rejoicing for the evolving democratic style political changes. The Rev. Dr. B. Clayton Bell, Billy Graham's brother-in-law and the Senior Pastor of Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, the then largest Presbyterian congregation in America, quickly made a trip to visit the Berlin wall site in December 1989, as many significant people in America were flocking to do. Dr. Bell had only two people under him. He had one Senior Associate Pastor who had responsibility over all the other pastors and ministry, while I, the Business Manager, was in charge of all administration (some laughingly said I had everything non-spiritual!)

It was in the spring of 1995 that the Music Ministry of our church organized a trip for the Chancel Choir to tour eastern Europe, providing singing and concerts in various venues, primarily in churches. With both Suzanne and myself being Chancel Choir members, it was our honor to be among the 86 or so people for that trip. We visited six countries, as I recall.

Though language barriers hindered some communication between us and the people, a lot of very positive connections were made, as we were able to rejoice with them for their newly found freedom after almost 30 years of political bondage. Singing was such a joy and a blessing. Many of those east European people had never had a Christian choir to travel to them, giving concerts as we did.

One thing clearly evident to us, being there less than six years after the fall of the Berlin wall, was how depreciated was the care and maintenance of the physical structures of their society. Most everything still needed painted or fixed somehow. Service and facilities in hotels where we lodged had what we could consider minimal provisions, compared to our American experiences. The prospect for becoming current, simply on routine maintenance, seemed in the distant future for them. Thirty-five+ years of European Communism, dominated by the USSR, had dashed all vestiges of economic well-being and prosperity.

A theme of this story seeks to give focus to LOVE, following the FALL! The attitude of all those on this choir trip of ministry was a desire to reach these new-found friends in Christian love, for those long-enslaved people.

There was one interesting action which Suzanne and I had the spiritual prompting to do. It was a form of personal giving. We had moved to Dallas in 1982, after a decade living in Saint Louis, Missouri. Needless to say, the winter coats we accumulated there were much heavier than we needed in the relatively warm Texas winters!

Instructions to the traveling choir members were that each person could take only one large suitcase. Suzanne's creative ability to pack compactly resulted in all of what we needed to be in only one large suitcase. So, the God-given idea (I am confident it was Him who gave it) was to pack the second large suitcase with as many of those heavy winter coats as we could cram in it! Winters are quite cold in eastern Europe! We would find ways to give them to these newly freed Europeans!

Being familiar with U.S. ministry practices, church clothes closets, etc., we expected to give the coats to their churches. To our surprise, distributed clothing, food or other things to people of modest means was not in their experience. Places doing that in their communities, such as Salvation Army, were unknown to them! Obviously, this is another hallmark of the character of a Communistic, Godless society!

We just started asking people we met if they would like a coat. Suzanne engaged one woman who was especially pleased to receive that very warm coat. Then, we saw she had a young daughter. One of our children's coats fit that child to a tee! It was especially moving for us when we saw the woman break down, crying with tears of joy and appreciation. It touched our hearts!

One coat was a full length formal coat for me, a pretty tall and large guy! We saw a large tall man standing on a street corner in downtown Budapest, Hungary, near

the Danube River. I approached him, with the coat in my arms, extended to him. Immediately, the language barrier showed our difficulty for him to know what I was doing. I wondered if he thought I was trying to sell him a coat! He seemed reluctant. Finally, I just placed the coat on his shoulders and walked away. We looked back after walking a little way, and waved at him. He was just standing there, seemingly awe-struck. By then, he'd taken the coat off his shoulders, and put his arms through its sleeves. He was rubbing its fabric with his hands. Again, our hearts were touched.

We were able to give away all the coats. What Christian joy we had. Thanks be to God! Then a God-given serendipity developed.

We now had an empty large suitcase. It seemed that some of the people on our trip had packed to the hilt in their suitcases, so there was little or no space for the souvenirs or other items for which they'd not planned, but wanted to purchase. It ended with our second suitcase being the overflow for our items and some of their items! We left home with a full second suitcase, and returned home with a full second suitcase, both times, serving a noble and useful purpose!

The things of giving in this story are just a small glimpse at the broad scope of being generous that I believe is God's will for all of us.!

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