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Orphans in the Ukraine

Operation Ukraine lighting candles in the children's dark

By *OnTheWeb*: Anne Burkhart [Friday, April 4, 2008](#)



Colombus-Miss. What does a cold, wet five-year-old girl begging in a Ukrainian bus station at night have to do with saving landfills in the United States? How could this little girl's plight lead to the formation of a charity called Operation Ukraine? The connecting threads are woven in the heart of a woman named Kathy Cadden.

Cadden's niece and her friend found the little girl when they were in the Ukraine during a church youth mission several years ago. They could not leave the poor child to spend the night in such a dangerous place with temperatures below freezing. Taking the little girl to their room, they fed, washed and clothed her. She said her name was Jenya. The next day Jenya showed them where she lived. They learned her mother frequently locked her out of the house and forced her to beg at the bus station.

Legally, Jenya could not be taken from her mother; but when she was abandoned at an orphanage, word reached the youth group. Cadden's niece traveled through slippery, snow covered roads to rescue the little girl from a life of certain misery. Today Jenya has been adopted by Cadden's sister and has a family that loves and cares for her.

A heartwarming story of one child whose life is now full of love and hope. What about the thousands of orphans left behind? That was the question that haunted Kathy Cadden. She

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soon learned that approximately 100,000 orphans are institutionalized in the Ukraine and the number is growing. Twice that number are living on the streets. Even the ones housed in orphanages are turned out to fend for themselves when they reach the age of 16. These teenagers do not have anywhere to go or any means of supporting themselves. Within two years 20% of them commit suicide; 60% become prostitutes or criminals; and only about 20% manage to find jobs.

Cadden knew she had to do something. She prayed for guidance and plunged ahead. Operation Ukraine was born in her small home in Columbus, Mississippi. With a very limited income, Cadden began collecting clothes, food, shoes, and anything else she could get to send to the Ukraine. The walls of her house were soon bursting at the seams. When a warehouse became available, Cadden and her fellow volunteer, Joey Thompson, laughed at the huge space and joked about how little room their boxes needed.

They were thinking in limited human terms. God was about to unfold His plan.

Today Cadden looks around the warehouse and no longer thinks it is very big. Every inch is filled with mountains of clothing, food and boxes, plus equipment waiting to be cleaned and repaired. The original mission to help improve the lives of orphans has expanded in ways no one could foresee. Not only does Cadden collect food, clothes, school supplies, blankets and rug samples for the orphanages, she also collects used hospital equipment to send to the Ukraine.

One day while picking up the used linens and towels from a local hospital, Cadden noticed a storage room filled with a jumble of hospital beds, tables, [chairs](#) and wheelchairs. When she learned it was headed for the landfill, she was horrified.

"Give it to me. I will take it away for you." This promise was backed up with a quick prayer and a few phone calls.

Thus began a new phase in Operation Ukraine: locating, repairing and shipping used hospital equipment to the Ukraine. Soon the warehouse was filled to the rafters with wheelchairs, walkers, sterilizers, operating tables, beds, [storage cabinets](#), and other items.

Cadden's church, The Seventh Street Church of Christ, helped launch the project with volunteers and support. She soon learned of other churches with similar missions. In John Kachelman, Cadden found a kindred spirit. As minister of the Judsonia Church of Christ in Arkansas, Kachelman is filled with the same zeal to help the poor people of the Ukraine as is Cadden. He guided her through the paperwork needed to set up an organization that passed muster with the State Department. What the State Department provides is the transportation for shipping the material she collects.

On or near a certain date, the State Department sends one or more 40-foot cargo [containers](#) to Operation Ukraine's warehouse in Columbus, Ms. Then, like a rapid response team, volunteers swarm to the warehouse and spring into action. Working non-stop, they must shrink wrap and load all the repaired equipment and boxed up materials into the containers. These containers join others from Florence, Alabama, Judsonia, Arkansas, Princeton, Indiana. and Jackson, Tennessee to be shipped to the Ukraine.

In 2004, nine 40-foot containers were shipped. Each year that many or more are filled with hospital equipment and supplies that were once destined for landfills. The U.S. Government pays for the transportation and gives protection to the goods under the



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international treaties between the two countries. All other costs are borne by the charities. In the Ukraine, local congregations of the Lord's Church help with the distribution process. Often political bosses and corrupt officials try to commandeer shipments to sell on the black market. It is of the utmost importance that consignees in the Ukraine are on the spot to protect and distribute the items.

Doctors and nurses in hospitals receive the used equipment and rejoice. Because of Operation Ukraine and other charities, many hospitals now have their first sterilizers, operating tables, [cabinets](#) for supplies and even basic materials like trays for medicines and wheelchairs.

Health care in the Ukraine is almost non-existent for the poor. And, because the majority of Ukrainians are poor, the death rate is high. Lung cancer, alcoholism, tuberculosis, HIV and malnutrition plague the population. In one hospital Cadden visited, the nurses cried when she brought them an ultra-violet light to treat children with tuberculosis.

Still it is the orphans that Cadden yearns to help. Each time she travels to the Ukraine she hopes to see improvements at the orphanages she visits. Each time she finds a greater need. The old buildings are dark, dank and dreary. On a recent visit to Karlovka, a rehab home for wayward children, she found that the 48 boys and girls are all bedded down on the same wing with only two attendants. Small boys are at the mercy of the older boys. Cadden has fears for the children's safety due to the lack of adequate supervision. What little education made available to the children comes from a visiting teacher and is haphazard at best. A lack of nutritious food is readily apparent on the drawn faces, lank hair and thin limbs of the children. With no positive stimulation the children languish and turn inward, or act out in self-destructive ways.

On a whim while packing for her latest trip to the Ukraine, Cadden included a bundle of chopsticks someone gave her. Describing what happened when she began teaching the children how to use the chopsticks, she said, "It was as if they became children right before my eyes. Their faces softened and grew animated. Even the 'baddest' boys behaved and tried hard. They were delighted to learn how to do something. I will never forget how excited they were over such a simple thing."

The year before Cadden used donations to purchase a ping pong table for Karlovka. Even after constant use, it was still in perfect condition. She hopes to raise enough money soon to buy them more ping pong tables, a [karaoke machine](#) and some games.

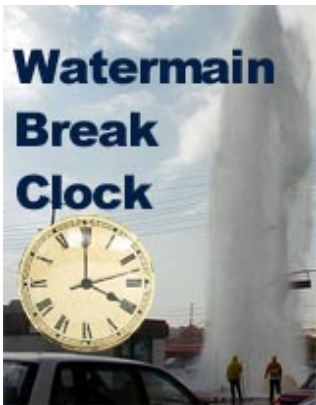
"They need activities. There is only one wood burning tool for crafts so only one child can use it at a time. They need games and crafts, pencils and paper, paint and brushes. Things children in the States would not value at all are treasures to the orphans."

The orphanage of Karlovka is in Donetsk Oblast, of southeastern Ukraine. The population is a mix of Ukrainians and Russians. Russian is the predominant language in the area. During the Orange Revolution of 2004, Cadden said that she carried two scarves when she rode the bus. She put her orange one on when she was with Yushchenko backers, and the blue one among Yanukovich supporters.

The tension between the Russian Ukrainians and the native Ukrainians is a constant state of affairs. The Russians want to return the country to Russian domination. The native Ukrainians remember the horrors they experienced under Soviet rule. In the thirties, Russia stripped the Ukraine of all its resources and starved the people. Stalin used brute force and public executions to terrorize the people. He took all their food and reduced the people to eating grass, [tree](#) bark, earthworms. Many instances of cannibalism have



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been recorded. An estimated 25,000 people were starving to death each day.

During these evil times, Walter Duranty was writing glowing reports for the New York Times about the wonders of communism and the greatness of Stalin. Even as he witnessed first hand the death and suffering of the Ukrainians, he did not waver in the lies and distortions he had published. Privately, he spoke of the genocide as a necessity- like having to 'break an egg to make an omelet'. He took his campaign to glorify Stalin and cover up his mass murders one step further. Whenever other journalists tried to report the truth, Duranty vilified them and called them liars. Such was Duranty's standing as the highly acclaimed reporter for the New York Times, his writings taken as fact and spread far and wide.

One of the journalists who tried to expose the truth of Stalin's starvation of the Ukrainians was Malcolm Muggeridge. He hid his identity and traveled at great risk to the Ukraine. When he saw the dead bodies and mass starvation, he wrote about it. Duranty heaped scorn on Muggeridge and turned many in the press against him.

Typically, it was Duranty who won the Pulitzer Prize. After his death, when his lies were exposed, the Pulitzer Board refused to rescind his award. Sig Gissler spoke for the board. He claimed the prize was not for Duranty's lies about the famine, but for other writings; leaving many to suppose the Pulitzer Board, like Duranty, is expert at re-writing history. Thus, Duranty remains to this day a proud symbol of the Pulitzer Prize ; and an example of the sort of writing the Board finds laudatory.

Eighty years after the famine and seventeen years after gaining its independence, the Ukraine is still suffering from the ravages of Soviet genocide. It is left to people like Kathy Cadden, John Kachelman and other Christian churches to try to reverse the devastation. The Ukraine is open for evangelism. Christians need to respond. Muslims certainly are seizing the moment. A ten million dollar mosque is under construction and more will follow. For two dollars a day a child can be fed in an orphanage. Surely good people can be stirred to action. The main stream media has not changed since Duranty's day. It will take the [Internet](#) to get the word out. Great things can happen when good people care enough to work together for a good cause. Helping the people of the Ukraine is a good cause by any honest person's measure.

Donations to Operation Ukraine can be sent to Operation Ukraine, P.O. Box 944, Columbus, Ms. 39701. The code for the charity is 501 3C. This is a tax deduction and all the money is used on the people in the Ukraine. There are no salaries or paid workers. John Kachelman's [web site](#) is HYPERLINK "http://www.kachelman.com" <http://www.kachelman.com>

(Local writer Anne Burkhart is a familiar face in Colombus live theatre, playing everything from Mayberry's Aunt Bea to Santa's Rudolph. A Sunday school teacher, Anne is wife of Skip and Mom to sons Glenn and Perry).

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