

A LONG WAY TO REACH THE AMERICAN DREAM

My grand doughtier gave me a poem called "Dreams." "When you find a dream inside your heart don't ever let it go. . .For dreams are the tiny seeds from which tomorrows grow." I was born on April 7, 1930 in Poland. My name was Jan. In our home, we spoke Ukrainian, and in school, we were educated in the Polish language. Under the Soviet regime, my name was Ivan and in school, we were educated in the Russian language. When we came to Germany, we had to learn German in school and my name was Johann Bettich. When I became an American citizen, my name was changed to John Bettig. In Russia and the Ukraine, I was best known by the name Ivan Romanovich Bettig.

Before I was drafted to the U.S. Army in October 1953, I experienced two different parts of World War II: the Polish war in 1939 and the Russian war in 1941. During the Polish war, we experienced the German blitzkrieg with immense bombing. It was an extremely dangerous situation. The Polish authorities arrested most German men and many of them were murdered. A Polish man informed my dad of his arrest and told him to hide. My dad followed his advice and was spared.

Few countries have known as much partition as Poland. After Germany attacked Poland in September 1939 and the Russians attacked from the east, the country was once again partitioned. We were caught in the tug of war between Germany and Russia. That partitioning resulted in our coming under Russian control. Since we lived close to the Russian border, we saw many Russian soldiers. There was much confusion among the locals who claimed the Red Army was arriving to save Poland from the Nazis.

Polish and Jewish citizens may have preferred a Soviet regime to the Germans, but the Soviets soon proved as hostile and destructive towards the Polish people and their culture as the Nazis. They began confiscating, nationalizing and redistributing all private and state-owned Polish property. They arrested many Polish citizens, mostly civilians, and deported them. Many of them died.

The land reform program initiated by the Soviets labeled large landowners as "kulaks". In our area, some of them were executed on the spot. Others were deported to Siberia, never to return. Their land was then divided among poorer peasants. Our property became a communist government possession. The Polish people were also considered communist government property.

During the Soviet occupation, nobody knew who would be arrested next and for what reason. People did not talk to each other out of fear of being accused of a crime for something they did or said. We, as children, attended Russian school to learn the Russian language. We were reminded that there is no God, and to be a good student and make good grades we should report what our parents did and said in our home to our teachers and other authorities. Some children sold out their parents. Anyone suspected of anti-Soviet activities was detained, sent to labor camps, prison, or executed. Some parents were shot in front of their children. Other parents were taken from their children and never seen again.

Since my Dad was of German descent, we were among those who resettled in Germany. We had to leave almost everything behind. We only took what we could carry, and that was not much since most of the children were small. It was an unusually cold winter in 1940. Because of heavy snow, the only way to get to the railroad station was by sled and horses. The sled ride took four to five hours. At the station, we were loaded into a freight train, many families in one wagon. In the middle of the railroad car was an iron stove and some wood to keep warm. The food was distributed at some stations.

The first 16 months in Germany, we were in 12 different refugee camps. Shortly before the war with Russia began, we were released from the camp and settled in the eastern part of Germany. In 1944 as we celebrated Christmas Eve it, was a time to remember the peace that should come to all men. We heard in the far distance the thundering of heavy artillery. We knew the Russians were coming and they

were very near. The question was, what should we do: flee with the rest of the people to the West or go hide in the forest? We knew many times those who were fleeing from the Russians were surprised by Russian planes. Many were killed and the wounded were left to die on the side of the road.

During the winter, my dad worked in the forest and knew some places where we could hide from the Russians. He decided we would go into the forest and hide. My father took my brother-in-law, Anton, and another man, Paul Opalko, and his family to stay with us. The Opalkos had seven children and we had eight children in our family at that time. My oldest brother, Paul, was in the German army and we didn't know where he was, or whether he was dead or alive. My brother-in-law, Anton, was married to my oldest sister, Helene. They had two children at the time, Anna and Helga. We all lived in one house.

These three men, my father, Anton and Paul, went deep into the forest, far away from the roads, to find a safe place to build a shelter. The shelter was 24 feet long, 12 feet wide and more than six feet deep and completely camouflaged. The night before the people of the village had to leave their homes, we also left ours going into our shelter and hoping the first front-line troops would soon pass so we could return to the village. We were so wrong.

After a few days in the shelter, nothing was happening. We heard activity of war far in the distance and we felt safe. We waited and waited but instead of the Russians coming, the Germans found us. They were surprised to find us in such a place and said: "What are you doing here? Don't you know you should go to the west of the Neisse River? You better go and go fast before the Russians catch you."

We did not have a horse to pull our wagon, only an ox. We put our belongings, which were few, on the wagon with the small children and headed for the west side of the Neisse River.

As we moved along, the German soldiers were laying mines on the road behind us, preparing for the Russians. We had to go through the forest at least six miles before we reached the village where we would cross the river. As we entered the village, there were no civilians anywhere to be seen. We only found one man who invited us to stay with him. My dad wanted to cross the river, but my mother begged him to stay on the eastern side. She said, "Don't go there because we are going into the fire." She was right.

During the night, the noise was unbearable and nobody could sleep. The German army moved across the river to the western side. There they positioned themselves ready to fight the Russians. The next morning it seemed that the world stood still. It actually was too quiet. The beautiful weather gave the notion of a peaceful atmosphere. This was now January, 1945. I said, "Mother, I will take my bicycle and go across the river to the city of Rothenberg. Maybe there I can find some food for us." My mother gave the reply, "Son, don't go, it is too dangerous." I told her not to worry, took my bike and said I would be back shortly.

I left the house and was on my way to the bridge. On my right side through the fields, I could see the river, knowing that the Germans could see me and I could become a target for some of them. On the left was a steep hill. On top of the hill was a cemetery making me a very visible target for the Russians. I was not very far from the house when suddenly machine gun fire erupted. I continued into the direction of the bridge. As I arrived at the bridge, I noticed some men scurrying about. I stopped to ask them what was happening. Their reply was, "Boy, what are you doing here? The Russians are here! We will blow up the bridge any moment. You better go and hide somewhere." It was clear to me that the Russians could overlook the western side of the river and perhaps see German soldiers and start shooting any second.

The Germans knew that on the hill the enemy was ready to fight. The battle developed to the highest point in a matter of minutes. Heavy artillery began to pound that hill. The house we stayed in was across the street from the cemetery. This was right in the danger zone. I had to get back to the house, a half mile away, as fast as my feet could peddle. I think it was the fastest bike ride of my life. As I

arrived at the house, I found all family members and our friends lined up with their hands up. Six Russian soldiers with fixed bayonets were interrogating them. All we knew and could tell them was that the Germans were on the other side of the river. They took valuables, like watches, from us, and told us to get away from the front-line.

First, we needed to get our ox that was sheltered in a dangerous place, a distance from us by the river. No one volunteered to get the ox and without him, we were stranded. Finally, my dad offered to go, but my mother said no and ordered me to go for the faithful beast. As a fifteen-year-old boy, I went with fear and trembling, while the rest of the group was praying for me. There is no doubt, that the Lord performed a miracle in protecting me and the animal in such a dangerous war-zone. Safely, and with a thankful heart, I returned.

In the meantime, the wagon was readied for the next trip taking us to a safer place. By then our poor ox was so frightened from all the artillery explosions on every side that he would not move. We blindfolded him and finally, with great effort, made it up the hill behind the cemetery heading back to the shelter in the forest. We traveled on a different road this time and weren't at all sure how to get back. Besides, we knew of mines on the roads making us more cautious as we went along. As we reached the forest, we moved forward trying to use the protection of the trees.

The war was now raging with explosions everywhere. The only thing we could do for our safety was to pray to God. We knelt, crying out to Him. During prayer, a large artillery rocket fell close to Dad who was standing next to the ox holding his head. The rocket never exploded! If it had, many of us would have been killed. God spared our lives again.

We continued moving between the trees going east away from the front-line. Evening was approaching and we didn't know where we were. We kept looking for the shelter but didn't know which direction to take. We were familiar with the area left behind because the sky was so very, very red from the continuous pounding of heavy weapons and planes. We pushed on wanting to reach a safer place but none was in sight. After a while, Russian troops filled the forest everywhere. There was no place to hide from them.

As they had done the first time they stopped us, they searched our wagon. Most of our food and bicycles were taken. Only one bicycle was left with us. They told us to follow them to a dirt road full of Russian troops marching west on either side. We were ordered to go east in the middle of the same road. We didn't want to go in the opposite direction because we knew the Germans were ready to bombard the Russian army at this point. The first chance available to us, we turned into the forest leaving the enemy behind. The search for shelter continued.

We came to one place where we felt safe to spread blankets on the ground for the children to lay down and sleep. My dad took the only bicycle remaining and went looking for some familiar place hoping to find the shelter. He came to one place, finding a beet that had fallen off the broken wagon as a load was being transported earlier to the shelter as feed for the ox. This beet was not there by accident, but as a road sign for Dad. He knew instinctively where he was and what direction to go. We all got to the shelter that same night, although long past midnight. What a relief to be back in the bunker. Here we stayed approximately four weeks hearing constantly in the background heavy pounding by the artillery. The trees all around us were stripped of their bark. The fighting between the Germans and Russians came closer. Several times shells hit close causing the entrance to our shelter to cave in.

In those days, the only refuge was to God. In all these dangerous situations, my mother encouraged us not to fear. She was a godly woman of great faith. She encouraged us by telling us that the Lord knew about our situation, and if He wanted us to live, He would protect us. I remember my mother, on her knees, praying for us. Whenever she prayed, we as children became very quiet as she was talking to God.

We survived and did not starve during this hard time. Our neighbor planned to hide with us in the forest. He buried canned goods and potatoes ahead of time, and only my dad knew of the location. When the time came to go, our good neighbor changed his mind deciding to go west with the rest of the refugees. His food saved our lives. This was the Lord's provision in time of great need.

We don't know how long we would have remained in the shelter if it hadn't been for one wrong move. We ran out of dry wood needed for cooking. Dry wood gives off less smoke than damp wood. We didn't want anyone to find us. My dad, my brother-in-law, Anton, and Mr. Opalko went looking for dry firewood. Dad knew where some piled wood could be found. Anton decided to pile three logs on his shoulder, the other two each took two thick logs and off they went. Anton couldn't keep up and soon lagged behind. Assuming he was following in the right direction, he actually became lost and didn't know it. Thinking the men were already were chopping wood, he followed the sound to reach "home".

As he came closer, he heard someone shout, "rooky vyerch", which in Russian means, "hands up". Too late, he realized this was a Russian army post. He dropped the wood and stood before several Russian soldiers pointing their guns at him. He immediately spoke with them in Russian, telling them his family is in the forest. Perhaps thinking he was a deserter or a spy, they didn't know what to do with him. They didn't trust him and wondered if he was telling the truth. Anton offered to lead the soldiers to the shelter, but was not sure which way to go. Finally, four soldiers agreed to go with him, ready with automatic weapons for an ambush.

In meantime, we were waiting for Anton, but he didn't come. We heard shooting in one direction and wondered if he was killed. We decided to look for him in the direction of the woodpiles. There, we saw in the far distance, several men walking in the other direction. We started running toward them and quickly recognized Anton walking in front of the soldiers pointing their guns at him. When they saw us, we put our hands up. After they searched us, they believed that Anton was telling the truth. They followed us to the shelter, finding many children present. They searched us for weapons. The only thing that looked suspicious to them was a map from our area under the mattress in a child's buggy. The officer in the group said: "Now I know who you are, you are spies. You took your family as a cover-up to your spying activity. You will not get away with this." With these remarks, he turned to the other soldiers giving an order to kill us.

My parents and others in the group started to explain that we weren't spies because we had neither telephone nor a radio. We told them the Germans were close, over the Neisse River, and that we were running from them. We assured them we were refugees. We begged them not to kill us. The children began to cry, others began to pray, depending on God for help. We could not see any escape. Then God did something unexpected. The soldiers walked away a short distance in order for us not to hear their discussion. They came back and said, "You get ready; we will go and return with a truck to pick you up." All four of them took off and left us alone.

As quickly as possible we put our few things and small children on our wagon, put the ox in front and off we went in the opposite direction. Again, we trusted God. We don't know if the Russian soldiers returned and searched for us. They could have easily sent the truck after us, and we assume they did, but perhaps in the wrong direction. I believe our Lord blinded their eyes so they could not see us. For ten miles (it seemed so long) we moved along a dirt road through the heavy forest going away from the front line. What we had seen on the road and in the forest, we shall never forget. Dead bodies everywhere! In some places, the German soldiers were run over by tanks, their bodies mingled with mud. We saw the horrors of war and the destruction of human life and dignity.

Arriving in the first village, we realized how hard it would be to find any shelter for 23 people. The Russian army occupied every shed, barn, stable and house. We did not know where to turn or where to go. It was the middle of February 1945. Luckily, there was no snow on the ground. We all were cold,

tired and very hungry. Children were crying. We older ones walked all this distance and we were ever so tired. All we could do was spread some blankets on the ground and lay down.

It seemed like nobody cared about us, but the Lord cared! Through a Russian woman officer, we found compassion as she saw the faces of the crying children. Her heart cared and she wanted to help us. Perhaps she missed her own children in Russia. She might have been through years of war and had seen some of her people die. She came to my mother like an angel sent by the Lord. She said something in German to my mother and my mother answered in Ukrainian. After a short conversation, the female officer said, "I will go and find a place for you, I will come for you."

She returned later and took us to a bakery. Soldiers were baking bread during the day for the troops. During the night, we were able to stay in the bakery, a warm place at last. We were unable to lie down, but we were very close to each other and thankful for the shelter for the night. Very early the next morning, we had to get out into the cold again. We didn't know where to go, so we stayed close to the building, praying, waiting for what to do next. Some wanted to go on, others were not in a hurry to leave.

The soldiers in the bakery began to bake bread with some bread already in the oven. There was another batch ready for the oven and yet more dough was rising and more sacks of flour stood around. Outside soldiers prepared food in the army field kitchen. Everybody was busy, only we sat there, waiting, not knowing what to do. Then came a sudden command for the army to move out immediately. The soldiers left the bread in the oven, the rising dough, and all the flour behind. It was all there for our nourishment! What gracious gifts from the Lord to provide our daily bread.

The next Army troops that came through the village were terrible. They raped the women, killed civilians, looted and took everything they wanted. Very few civilians remained, almost all of them escaped to the west. The houses were left with all the belongings in them. Many people escaped with their life.

We discovered that our lives were again in danger. My father was taken by the Russians and accused of killing Jews. Numerous times, they were ready to kill him. Every time, some distraction or someone prevented the killing. We hid in places where we felt the Russians would not find us. On one occasion, we crawled into an attic with a roof full of bullet holes. Some unexploded rockets lay around. We hid until the Russians found us again. They drove us out yelling to go east. We went to the next town or village to hide again.

In some places, drunken soldiers would shoot inside the house. Once they came while we were on our knees praying. They stood over us waiting until we finished. Then they told us to go to the city of Buntzlau where the train will take us to Russia. We knew by boarding that train we eventually would end up in Siberia.

During this time of hiding, we always needed food. We looked in empty houses that were unsafe. Russian soldiers seemed to be everywhere. Usually I, at the age of fifteen, took on the responsibility to search the empty houses for food and material items that were left behind by German civilians. One time my younger brother, Alexander, and I went looking for food. We found a little wagon that we pulled. On that day, we also found plenty of food. We piled the wagon up to the top with canned goods, dried fruits, and grains. We made our way back to the house we were staying in, but everyone had left. We looked around noticing wagon tracks in the dirt road. We knew then that our family had left for sure.

We followed in that direction pulling our loaded wagon behind us. The road led up a hill. From there

we hoped to get a glimpse of them. With great effort, we reached the top and in the distance, we saw another hill even steeper than the first. Finally, we made it to the top of the second hill and recognized our ox and the wagon. Going down the hill was easy. We started to run calling out to mom and dad and never letting go of the wagon and its precious cargo. They spotted us too and soon we were reunited with our family. Mother was happy to see us, but Dad gave us both a good spanking for our dangerous adventure.

We continued slowly on the way to Buntzlau with the intention never to arrive there. Our hope was soon shattered when a truck approached us. Several Russian soldiers had caught up with us and ordered us into the truck. We thought it was the end, no more escaping. The truck took us close to Buntzlau to a village where the Russians rounded up all the cows that were running loose. The German farmers untied all farm animals before they left their homes fleeing for the West. There were approximately 2,000 cows. Some were butchered and made into delicious sausages to feed the combat troops.

My parents were forced to milk cows both morning and evening. They assisted with the butchering, working very hard all day long. At this point of my life, at age 15, I was given a Russian uniform, a gun, and a horse, riding with their unit to the front to fight the Germans. First, they told my dad not to worry about me. I would only be their interpreter. However, it wasn't so. I brought supplies to the combat troops. Several times, they kept me in the combat zone in great danger.

This was the most difficult time in my life. I grew up in a very conservative Christian family. I was taught not to be among people who swear and drink. There I was, not by choice, in the middle of sin all around me. I recall as a boy buying matches one day for a man who needed them for his cigarettes. When my dad heard about this, he gave me a hard spanking saying I was instrumental by contributing to this man's sin. Now here I was in a most difficult situation, over which I had absolutely no control. These people were godless and reckless to say the least. In their eyes, human life was very cheap. They beat me and threatened me with their guns because I refused to drink vodka with them. In their drunken condition, they bragged about the number of Germans they had killed. They talked about other inhumane actions too shameful to list here.

These soldiers tried to destroy my life and my character. Many nights I would not sleep because I was forced to stay awake and make vodka for them. Nevertheless, I thank the Lord for some good men who were still humane. They defended and protected me at times. One sergeant was like a father figure, making me comfortable in his presence. I knew when I was with him no one would harm me. I grew up very fast with all that brutality around me. I realized then, and know now, that only God through Christ Jesus can change the hearts of sinful men. This led me, later in my life, to 32 years of missionary service, bringing the Gospel of hope and peace to the Russian people in Monte Carlo with Trans World Radio.

There was another man with whom I tried to spend more time. He was a Kirghiz, a generous man. Anything he would have to eat, he would share with me. In his presence, I felt secure. It does not matter if a man is good or bad, Russian, German, American or any other nationality. All men are equal in the sight of God. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance and be saved."

One night, a lot of noise awakened us. There was shouting and singing. What was going on? The war was over and this was the celebration: May 8, 1945. It was not very long after the war was over that a rumor circulated. The army unit that my parents worked for and where I was would be moved back to Russia. They needed more people to help them move. It meant our family would go with them. We knew there was no way out. We could not escape and that would be our end. My dad tried to persuade the commanding officer to allow us to stay because my mother was pregnant with her tenth child and could have the baby anytime. He did not give much hope. We all prayed, asking the Lord to help us,

and God answered. My mother gave birth to her tenth child. This changed our situation. The Russians realized they could not take a woman and a little baby on a wagon pulled with horses. My parents were permitted to stay.

How about me? My dad went to the commanding officer and begged him to let me stay with my parents. The officer and some of the soldiers told me before, that they would take me to Russia and make a man out of me. Now it seemed that they were serious. It did cost my dad a lot of talking, to no avail. My dad knew that with vodka he could bargain. He got a bottle of vodka and brought it to the commanding officer who was willing to let me go and remain with my parents. Yes, for one bottle of vodka my dad bought me back from the Russians. A bottle of vodka meant more to him than me. That was true under communism. Life was very cheap and we knew that we were in constant danger.

After we escaped from the communists in 1946, we went to West Germany. In 1947, my dad applied for immigration to the USA for the whole family. It was a long process. We needed a sponsor and the US government investigated whether we were in the Communist Party or Nazi Party. In the years of waiting, three children were married and I was no longer considered a minor because I was over 21 years of age. Finally, in November 1951, with six of their children, my parents were able to go to America.

I had to apply myself to immigrate to the United States. During that time, I worked in a coal mine and my physical examination showed that I had some spots on my lungs. This condition did not allow me to go to the USA. The doctor, who examined me, recommended that I should quit the coal mine and go work on a farm. My condition required much fresh air and plenty of fresh milk. I followed the doctor's advice and went to work on a farm. Every morning and every evening, I had to milk 20 cows by hand. I had a lot of milk and plenty of fresh air. After six months, I went for another physical examination and I passed the test for immigration.

My first contact with Americans was at an immigration camp in Wentorf, West Germany where I had to visit several offices, sign several documents and promise that I would obey the laws of the land and be willing to serve the United States. I was also informed that I could volunteer to be part of the ship's crew. They needed kitchen staff, a cleaning crew, a guard and a few other crew members. I volunteered to be the guard. Those who volunteered boarded the ship a few days earlier to receive some training for their responsibilities.

I was assigned to certain parts of ship where I was responsible for the safety of the ship and its passengers. In case of fire or flood, I had to shut some doors. I was very happy to get on the ship before the rest of the passengers. I was looking forward to having a good cup of coffee. In Germany, we would take corn or barley, roast it, grind it, and make "coffee" from it. On the ship, I could drink as much coffee as I wanted. It was also on the ship that I ate a grapefruit for the first time. The only problem was my system was not used to that much coffee and the consequences were sleepless nights.

After the war, the American government brought shiploads of military personnel to Germany. Returning to the US, the ships were full of refugees, and it was my privilege to be one of those. It was my first trip on an ocean. It was a great and generous gift of the American government to accept us and give us a free trip to America. That shows the compassion and concern of a government for people who lost everything during the war and needed help desperately.

Remember the Poem called "Dreams?" "When you find a dream inside your heart don't ever let it go. . . For dreams are the tiny seeds from which tomorrows grow." I wanted the American dream. When my Dad would tell us about his two brothers in Benton Harbor, Michigan, that they had a fruit farm, a tractor and a car, it seemed too good to be true. I dreamed of what it would be like to have a job with good pay and a car of my own.

May 13, 1952, I arrived in New York City on the USS General M. L. Hersey. I will never forget as we came into the New York Harbor., on the left side we could see the Statue of Liberty and on the right side, we saw the skyscrapers of New York. Close to shore was a highway. It must have been rush hour because I had never seen so many cars at one time in all my life. It was simply overwhelming to see a picture like that. This was not a dream. This was real.

During that time, one question came to mind: Why did God bless America more than any other nation in the world? Have you ever asked that question? Have you ever thought why God has given you the privilege to be born in America and to enjoy all the benefits and the blessings that God has showered upon this country? It took me a long time to discover things about this country. For me, it is clear that this country was founded upon the principles of the Word of God, that all people are equal and that every human being has the right to be free. Today we are enjoying that freedom, freedom that we simply take for granted, forgetting that it is a special gift from government, and a special blessing from God.

The long train ride from New York to Niles, Michigan, was also a great experience. Arriving in Niles, Michigan I was expecting someone to pick me up and bring me to my uncle in Benton Harbor. He came to the United States from Russia in 1912. To my surprise, nobody was there to pick me up. There I was in a foreign country, in a strange place and not knowing the language, I waited. There was a man at the station who came to pick up his friend, but the friend never arrived on the train. He came to me, saw a little piece of paper tacked to my jacket, and read the information of who I was and where I had to go. He informed me in German that he knew my uncle and he would take me to him. As I arrived, my uncle was surprised to see me. I was surprised he had not received my telegram informing him of my coming. We were all very happy that someone had been so kind and helpful in my situation.

It was tomato planting time and there was much work to be done. I had some time to eat and change my clothes, and then immediately went to my uncle's farm and began planting tomatoes. It was the first time in my 22 years I knew I would be paid according to how hard I worked because the planting was piecework. I would get up very early so that I could start as soon as it was light and work until dark. The first week my uncle gave me \$40 and I thought that I was a rich man. In two months, I made enough money to buy a '39 Ford for \$80 and I also purchased a suit for \$18.. Standing beside my car wearing the new suit, I took a picture and sent it to my friends in Germany. They did not believe I got rich so fast.

For several months, I was working for my uncle and for some other farmers, trying to earn some more money and studying English, my fifth language. I was privileged to have some relatives in Benton Harbor, Michigan who were very helpful, especially my cousin Linda, who helped me get my driver's license.

One day she said to me, "John, I work in a factory called New Products and I will take you to Stanley Miller. He is the owner of that factory and I will ask him to give you a job." I will never forget that meeting with Mr. Miller. It was something unusual for me to be in the office of the owner. It was something that I never expected. The owner of the factory wanted to speak to me personally. I was humbled and thankful when Mr. Miller got up from behind his desk, came to me, shook my hand and welcomed me to America.

After a short conversation giving him information about my life and expressing my appreciation of being in America, Mr. Miller said, "I have a job for you. I have a German speaking foreman and he will be your supervisor." I started my work as a metal polisher and sander. The work went very well and I enjoyed it. It was piecework and I made good money. I got rid of my '39 Ford and bought a '41

Ford. I was on my way to a greater future; I was now living the American dream.

In our family, I was the only one who had a car and I provided transportation for everyone. I felt important and proud to have a car that I could use for my family. When my dad would ask me to take him somewhere, I was always ready to do it. One day he asked me to take my mother and him to the Wittmaiers in St. Joseph, Michigan. My parents and the Wittmaiers knew each other from Solomka, Poland.

That evening I saw a beautiful girl, Alma Wittmaier. She acted quite mature and she seemed to be a serious person. My desire was to see her again very soon. This became reality when I discovered that the Wittmaiers did not have a car. I offered my service to provide transportation. Through this, I was able to see Alma more often, and slowly build a friendship. This was a unique experience. We were born in the same village in Poland, and met in St. Joseph, Michigan. We came from the same background, having experienced much of the same suffering, fear and danger. We both knew what it meant to be hungry. We had many things in common and I believe that attracted us to each other.

After I was in the United States for 17 months, I discovered something I never expected. I discovered I had a rich uncle, Uncle Sam. He wrote me a nice letter, congratulating me that I had been chosen to serve in the US Army. I was proud to be chosen to serve the greatest country in the world. I am not sure, but it could have been before I was allowed to immigrate, I had to sign some documents and one of them was volunteering to be in the US Army. October 21, 1953, I reported to Detroit. From Detroit, I traveled to Fort Knox, Kentucky. There I received my orientation, equipment and clothing.

As a new recruit, I was taken to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I was given a questionnaire asking what were my first three choices to do in the army. My first choice was to be a cook, the second to be a tank driver and the third, be an interpreter. I had an interview about the cooking. Since I did not have any experience in cooking and weighed only 120 pounds, they thought I would spend more time eating than cooking. I was not accepted. The second interview was about being a tank driver. I was rejected. Finally, I had to take a test in German and Russian. No one knew those languages. I was given a record player that played German and Russian, then they asked me questions. I received several pages of paper with multiple choices of answers and I had to choose the right answer. In several days, I was told "Yes, you qualify to be an interpreter, but we don't have a job for you. We will be training you as a combat engineer." I thought, "Well, I saw some of the world already, now I can see more of it: Korea.

Fort Leonard Wood was named after Maj. Gen. Leonard E. Wood, chief of staff of the United States of Army from 1910 to 1914, and a hero of the Spanish-American War. Only a handful of officials were on hand December 3, 1940 to witness the groundbreaking ceremonies of Fort Leonard Wood. It started five months of activity that resulted in the completion of 1,600 buildings and all the utilities necessary to provide for one of the nation's largest army post. During my time of service, the strength of the post was approximately 28,000 military personnel and 2000 civilian employees. I was assigned to "D" Battery, 62nd AFA Battalion. The battery commander was Second Lieutenant William L. Donais. The Commanding General was Major General Arthur W. Pence.

Before I could receive engineering training, I had eight weeks of basic training. That included marching, inspection in ranks, the practice of firing different weapons such as rocket launchers and how to use hand grenades. I had to listening to many different lectures on different military topics. One of the most difficult parts of training was the infiltration course. During the attack course I was usually the aggressor waiting somewhere in a foxhole, where I would be captured by the attackers.

After the first eight weeks of training, the general congratulated us. His letter included this message. "You have reached the halfway mark in your life as a trainee. During the past eight weeks, you have been given the essentials of how to be a basic soldier. During the next eight weeks, you will have the opportunity to perfect that basic training and to gain fundamental instruction as an Engineer Soldier.

You should then be ready to take your place anywhere in the world alongside the thousands who have preceded you in the defense of freedom and the service of your country. On graduation day, it is my hope that each of you will carry in his heart the conviction that he is a good American citizen, a capable engineer soldier, and a first class fighting man. I have watched your progress with pride. I look forward confidently to your future success. Good luck!" Major General Arthur W. Pence, Commanding General, signed it.

I also received some leave time for Christmas. I went home and gave an engagement ring Christmas present to Alma. She was very much surprised and happy. We were not at all happy with the understanding that I may go to Korea, but we were prepared to accept that situation. We were hoping for the best.

At Fort Leonard Wood, I started mine engineering training. Here is the mission of the Corp of Engineers: "... Increasing the combat power of field forces..." Whether it be by construction or destruction, the engineers are primarily concerned with facilitating the movement of friendly troops and impeding that of the enemy. It is for that mission that men of the 6th Armored Division are trained, upon completion of their training at the world's largest engineer training center, men of that Super Sixth have received instruction in providing passage through obstacles, both natural and man-made. Demine operations, river crossings, bridging, passage of obstacles, beachheads, airheads and demolitions all come within the scope of activities of the Corp of Engineers. Hindering enemy movement, by means of hastily erected barriers, such as roadblocks and minefields, as well as deliberately prepared zones off obstacles is but a portion of the Corps of Engineers. Other missions undertaken by the Engineers include water supply; production, reproduction and supply of maps, mosaics, map substitutes and relief models; reproduction and distribution of aerial photographs; operation of utilities; supply of construction, fortification and camouflage material and other engineer equipment; operation of landing craft in amphibious operations; beach operations; combat as infantry; and battle field illumination. Such is the mission of the Corps, in past wars and in the present conflict; the Corps of Engineers has been cited for a job well done. Aiding the Corps in the successful compilation of its mission in the current action had been many men of the 6th Armored Division and Fort Leonard Wood.

After completing my engineering training, the Benton Harbor, MI. News Palladium wrote, "Pvt. John Bettig completed engineer basic training at Fort Leonard Wood Missouri, in a unit of the Sixth Armored Division. Since entering the army, he received eight weeks of basic training in the fundamentals of army life and the use of infantry weapons and an additional eight weeks engineering training. During engineer basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Pvt. Bettig was taught the use of power tools, construction of fixed and floating bridges and related subject, besides additional combat skills. At the end of the training cycle with the famed "Super Sixth", men completing training at Fort Leonard Wood are selected either for specialist schools or as replacement for other units."

I was surprised to receive the good news that I was not going to Korea but I would be sent to Germany. That was something that I did not expect. Uncle Sam was so good he gave me everything I needed for a free trip to Germany. I had not been in the US for even two years and I was on the ship going back to Germany. I arrived in Bremerhaven, Germany on the USS General Blatchford on April 23, 1954. I stayed in Germany for 18 months. During that time, I will be able to go visit many of my friends and relatives. I had a lot to brag about life in America and to be a proud American soldier.

I was informed that I was chosen for duty assignment to Headquarter Company, 2nd Battalion, 22 Infantry Regiment, S -2 as interpreter to the Intelligence and Security Military Unit. To be part of this unit I had to be an American citizen qualified for top-secret clearance. At that time, I was not an American citizen, as to the clearance, I was investigated by the US government and received clearance to come to America. To become a US citizen, I needed to fill out numerous forms and in short order,

with two witnesses, report in Frankfurt, Germany where I was sworn in as a citizen of the United States of America.

I received all kinds of training. I spent certain time on border patrol, which I really enjoyed. During the day, we would travel along the border through villages and towns and enjoy the scenery. We could stop anywhere in a guesthouse and buy a meal for less than a dollar. My favorite meal was, schnitzel with fried potatoes and salad. It was quite cheap because the exchange rate for US \$ 1.00 was 4.20 DM.

Survival training was mandatory. This was difficult because we had to stay away from civilization. I would catch fish; find some blueberries in the forest as well as some mushrooms. Once in a while I overstepped the rules and went to the store and bought some bread and sausage and that was a big help. Other training had to do with learning how to be behind the enemy lines.

Most of my time was spent in the office with some officer, and that gave me special status. I was not assigned to any kitchen duty or guard duty. I can say that my time in Germany as an American soldier was very important, and valuable. I felt I had a special privilege and honor to be an American soldier. The Army taught me discipline, dedication and determination. A soldier must be courageous, committed to the cause of his calling. I was somebody. When I visited my friends or my relatives, they respected me. I was an American soldier. When I shared with them about the American way of life, they got excited. My brother and two sisters who were married came to America. Six of my friends also followed my advice and immigrated to America. All of them lived the American dream. All of them are financially independent because they worked hard and knew how to save money.

In Germany, the recruiting officer, trying to persuade me that if I would enlist into the Army I would be promoted and receive all the educational I wanted, also approached me several times. I wrote a letter to my fiancée telling her that I would come home, we would get married, and I would reenlist and take her with me to Germany. She wrote, "You can do that, but without me. I decided to return and get married and progress in civilian life.

I received an honorable discharged from Fort Sheridan, Illinois on October 6, 1955 and remained in the army reserve for six years. My service number was US 55 440 330. I was promoted to Pfc. and received the National Defense Service Medal and the Army of Occupation Medal (Germany). I am also a member of the American Legion, Michigan Department, Post Number 0163, and Member ID Number 101869724. Three of my brothers served also in US Armed Forces. Alex served with the Marines in Korea and Erich in the Air Force and Peter served with the Marines as Combat Photographer in Vietnam.

I immediately went back to work since the job at New Products was waiting for me. November 26, 1955 I got married and started a family. A year later, I bought a brand-new 1956 six cylinder Chevy and started to build a new house. By 1958, the house was finished and I started my second job. I also begin to work on my high school diploma, through La Salle Extension Institute in Chicago, by correspondence. In 1965, I began my theological education at Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music. I also studied languages at Western Michigan University.

For four years, I was pastor of the Wayside Chapel in Plainwell, Michigan. In 1970, the Evangelical Free Church of America ordained me. In December the same year, we joined Trans World Radio and moved to Monte Carlo, Monaco. Through TWR, the gospel was brought to the Soviet Union from a radio station that Adolf Hitler built for his propaganda purposes. For five years I worked as a studio technician, editor and announcer. I produced Russian programs and helping in other language program development.

In 1975, we went to West Germany to be the representatives for the Russian department, where we developed a relationship with Russian speaking people who had immigrated to West Germany from the

Soviet Union. In the offices of Trans World Radio German National Partner, Evangeliums Rundfunk, we established a Russian department. By 1987 the Russian staff from Monte Carlo, was moved to Germany merging both entities into one Russian radio ministry. As director of the Russian department, I provided oversight of the production of Russian programs that were aired from Trans World Radio, Monte Carlo into the formal USSR.

After delegating my responsibilities to the young Russian workers I had trained, we were transferred to the United States in 1988. I continued to serve with TWR in banquets, mission conferences, and other church services. I traveled in many foreign countries representing TWR. After 32 years of service, I retired on December 31, 2002. The Grand Rapids School of the Bible and Music Alumni Association recognized me for a life of dedicated Christian service and consistent Christian testimony in 1979. I also was granted an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Indianapolis Christian University in December 2000.

In 2004 I founded CIS, "Christian Involvement in Service", a nonprofit mission organization with eight specific goals: 1. Bible Education; 2. Evangelism; 3. Raising support for national missionaries; 4. aid in the construction of church buildings; 5. Helping the needy and orphans; 6. Gospel radio broadcast; 7. Rehabilitation centers, and 8. Prison ministry. I served as president for this organization until October 2009. This involved much traveling to Russia, the Ukraine and Moldova preaching in many national churches. Twelve times, I taught special courses at the Russian Bible School in Samara, Rostov and Moscow Theological Institutes. I also traveled with church groups from the United States to Ukraine to aid the national believers, in church construction and served as an interpreter. My wife, Alma, traveled with me to many different countries and has been my private secretary in German and English.

We have four children. Frank, the oldest, works with "at-risk" students in Grand Rapids Michigan. He is also a founder and board member of EaRN, Employment and Resource Network, a mission that helps churches and organizations begin ministries to the unemployed and underemployed. Harry, our second son, has already been with Trans World Radio for thirty years. He is the Director of TWR Europe Media Service,. Our daughter, Gloria, is Public Safety and Communication officer at the Gallatin County 911 Dispatch Center in Bozeman, Montana. Our youngest son, Jeff, is the Food Service Director and Head Chef at Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

We live the American dream at 826 Oakridge Drive, St. Joseph, Michigan, 49085. My contact information is: phone: 269-429-0814, and e-mail: jbettig@sbcglobal.net. I am still available for speaking engagements.