

Real Life Stories
I Found the Gospel in Communist Romania

And then I shared it with the man the government sent to kill me.

VIRGINIA PRODAN | SEPTEMBER 23, 2016



Like most people, I was born with a hunger for truth and freedom. Unfortunately, I was born in Communist Romania under the brutal totalitarian regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. Ceausescu's Romania was a land of lies, where simply questioning a government directive could lead to imprisonment, physical torture, and—in some cases—death.

Needless to say, we lived in a constant state of anxiety and mistrust. Anyone could arbitrarily denounce a neighbor, classmate, or family member for making “anti-government” statements. The government even had spies planted in the churches. The best way to avoid trouble was to remain silent, question nothing, and try to blend in.

For years, I watched my parents and relatives play the part of “good citizens” while privately whispering their contempt for the government. I wondered, Why do people always speak in whispers? Why are they so afraid to speak the truth?

‘Do you go to church?’

The more fear battered those around me into silence, the more obsessed I became with finding the truth. After graduation, I went to law school and became an attorney. But my job—assigned by the government—consisted of little more than rubber-stamping newly-created communist rules and regulations. It was demoralizing.

One evening a client came in to discuss some paperwork related to a property settlement. We had been meeting for months now, and frankly, I was exhausted. But this particular client never seemed to get discouraged. He always smiled, and he had a sense of contentment unlike anything I had ever seen. It was as though he were somehow oblivious to all of the misery that surrounded him. He radiated joy and peace, and for some reason, it troubled me.

Without thinking, I confessed, “I wish I had what you have in your life. I wish I had your sense of peace and happiness.”

“Do you go to church?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “On Christmas and Easter. Why?”

“Would you like to come with me to my church this Sunday?”

My first instinct was to decline. After all, the communist government was notoriously anti-church. Under Ceausescu's rule, Christians were frequently arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. Church buildings were bulldozed, their land confiscated to make room for Ceausescu's palace. Anyone who questioned his anti-God stance was either thrown in jail or “disappeared.” For all I knew, this could be a trick to test my loyalty. I paused briefly to consider my next move. Then I saw once again that look of peace and contentment. I wanted that—so much so that I decided it was worth the risk.

The next Sunday I visited his church. As soon as the choir finished the opening song, the pastor read John 14:6 —“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” I could not believe what I heard. Someone was claiming to be the truth?

Real Life Stories
I Found the Gospel in Communist Romania

As the pastor continued to describe the truth of Jesus Christ, I felt as though the verses he shared were written specifically for me. Looking across the aisle, I saw my client. He smiled, nodded, and gently patted his Bible as if to say, “Now do you understand?”

I did. Without realizing it, I was beaming back at him. For the first time in my life, everything made sense. I had spent years searching for the truth, but I had been looking in the wrong places—law school, the government, the justice system. I suddenly realized that truth was something that came not from law books, but from God himself: the Creator of the universe—my Creator, the source of all life, peace, and happiness.

Barely able to contain my excitement, I accepted the pastor’s invitation to trust in Christ as Lord and Savior. From that moment on, I would dedicate my life to pursuing and speaking the truth, no matter the cost.

My Greatest Test

Shortly after I was baptized, I began defending fellow Christians facing imprisonment for transporting Bibles across the Romanian border, sharing their faith, or worshipping privately in their own homes.

This quickly made me a target. Many days I awoke to find my tires slashed. Clients and friends—even my children—were threatened. My daughters and I were held under house arrest for almost a month. I was kidnapped, bullied, pushed into moving traffic, and beaten by the secret police. For their own protection, friends and coworkers began keeping their distance. My faith was tested daily. My greatest test, however, was yet to come.

Late at night, after a long day in court, Miruna, my legal assistant, peeked into my doorway: “A big man in the waiting room says he wants to discuss a case.” She shrugged. “That’s all he will tell me.”

I was taken aback at how enormous he was. As he sat down in front of my desk, his eyes seemed to bore a hole straight through me, and a sneer formed at the corner of his mouth. Slowly, he pulled back his coat and reached into a shoulder holster, withdrawing a gun.

“You have failed to heed the warnings you’ve been given,” he said, aiming at me. “I’ve come here to finish the matter once and for all.” He flexed his fingers, and I heard a distinctive click.

“I am here to kill you.”

My hands shook. Fight-or-flight instincts pinged in my brain. My chin trembled. An image flashed through my mind: my assistant arriving in the morning and finding my lifeless body on the office floor.

I was alone with my killer. And yet, I was not. I began silent, fervent prayers, recalling God’s promises. His Spirit breathed peace into my panicked heart. Then I sensed his message: Share the gospel.

I considered the man before me. Behind those hate-filled eyes was a creation of God. He had an immortal soul, and he needed to know about the love God has shown in Jesus Christ. At once emboldened, I met my killer’s eyes. “Have you ever asked yourself: ‘Why do I exist?’ or ‘Why am I here?’ or ‘What is the meaning of my life?’ I once asked myself those questions.” My voice stayed calm and did not waver.

He slid his gun back into the holster. I leaned forward. “You are here because God put you here, and he has put you to a test. Will you abide in God or in the will of a man—your boss, President Ceausescu, who requires you to worship him? God has given you free will to choose.”

His eyes softened. My heart thumped even faster, and my confidence rose.

“The truth is that we have all been corrupted and gone away from God.” He nodded. “We all are sinners, and our sin has determined our future. Hebrews 9:27 says, ‘People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.’”

Real Life Stories
I Found the Gospel in Communist Romania

His mouth fell slightly open, and his hands relaxed.

“But the good news is that God has prepared a way out for every one of us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’”

As I continued to talk with him, he appeared smaller and more peaceful.

Finally, he brought his hand to his forehead and said, “You are right. The people who sent me here are crazy. I do need Christ.” He promised, “I will come to your church as a secret brother in Christ. I will worship your powerful God.”

And with that, my killer walked away saved—a brother in Christ. He went on to enroll in seminary, and we have even kept in touch. He, like me, had found the Truth. And neither of us will be afraid to speak it ever again.

Virginia Prodan is an international human rights attorney, and an Allied Attorney with the Alliance Defending Freedom. She is the author of Saving My Assassin (Tyndale).

. . . . Gleaned From Christianity Today