

Real Life Stories

Life In A Concentration Camp In Russia

One evening I said to Alexander, “How did you come to have such a living faith in God?”

He answered, “I have been in this concentration camp for a long time. Before I was just like the rest of you. I had not forgotten about God, but I did not take Him seriously. That changed one day in August 1948. At that time I was working in Rudnik, in the southwestern part of the city of Workuta. We were building a new shaft. Two Christians from another concentration camp came to join our crew. One was an older man and the other one was younger. Even though they were quite simple men, they were so influential that no camp officer wanted them for very long, and they were continually being transferred. While they were with us they refused to work on Sundays. They were beaten and imprisoned but they refused to work. They strictly obeyed the commandments of God and they were very often the topic of discussion in the camp. Some respected them while others mocked them. But the number that mocked them continually declined. This made the camp officer, a young bloodthirsty secret detective, very angry. It made him so angry that he could find no peace.

One Sunday when the two men refused to work, he decided to make an example of them the next day. We noticed on our way to the pit that something was wrong. Instead of the two regular watch dogs there were six. The dogs howled much worse than usual. They could not have been fed.

After we had begun to work, the camp officer appeared. He commanded the two Christians to leave the pit and go out into the tundra. We all, as well as the two Christians, knew what that meant. They could have refused to go. It was an unlawful command, one which the camp officer was not allowed to give – the command to escape, and afterwards to say, that in an attempt to escape they were killed. But they did not refuse. That would have been contrary to their faith. They quietly went through the gate; first the older one, followed by the younger one. They had taken off their caps and carried them in their folded hands and prayed. We had gathered at the fence to see what would happen.

After they had gone about sixty yards the secret detective chased the dogs after them. When the two men heard the dogs, they turned around. The older one took the hands of the younger one and crossed them over his breast and then did likewise. They lifted their eyes to heaven, there was nothing to see but a sunny sky, and moved their lips. We couldn't hear above the howling of the dogs, but apparently they were singing. By now the dogs were only a few feet from their prey. Everyone knew what would happen now. Most of us covered our eyes with our hands so as not to see. But when the enraged dogs reached the men, they seemed confused and ran around the two men in a circle. The angry howling changed to a puzzled whine, and finally to a friendly whimper. The dogs crawled to the men's feet, wagged their tails and licked their shoes. Now one could plainly hear that the men were singing. We all, even some secret detectives, crossed ourselves. Many of us were so moved that we sobbed loudly. The camp officer became quite pale and immediately left the pit. Finally one of the secret detectives whistled to the dogs and called the two men to come back.

In this moment I saw that there is something much stronger than the power (of Communism) which has conquered half of the world and perhaps one day shall conquer the whole world. And even if this tragedy should happen, God lives and does miracles and still speaks to us, as He did in times past, because He loves us.

Since that day I am a Christian. In fact, many were saved that day although not all withstood the testings that were to follow. This miracle was talked about in every concentration camp in Workuta. That same evening the commanding officer sent the two men away. It was said later that they were taken to a concentration camp in the forest lands toward the south, where no one would know of the incident. The secret detective did not dare to touch them again.”

.....Bernhard Roeder