

Joseph Shklarsky Finds a Firmer Foundation

When, in the fall of 1954, our organization transferred us from Marseille, France, to Augsburg, Germany, Betty and I immediately became immersed in ministry among the Russian and Ukrainian displaced persons and refugees. Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings we conducted services in downtown Augsburg for Ukrainians. Sunday afternoons and Thursday evenings, we had meetings at an out-of-town camp for Germans and others from Russia.

Joseph Shklarsky attended the Ukrainian meetings in town. He was 40, single and a sincere evolutionist, if not a true atheist. He said he came to the services because he was lonely. Later, he would come to our apartment to debate creationism and the existence of God. In Russia, he had been a respected schoolteacher. As all good atheistic teachers in good standing, year after year he had taught his students the "facts and science" of evolution. And it was evident that Joseph considered himself to be a highly intelligent and educated man. I was a rookie missionary.

Fortunately, Joseph was also into languages. He knew book English quite well. Although, back in those days, there was no theistic-creationist literature in the Russian or Ukrainian languages, there was some in English. I started to give him what I had and sent for more from America. Joseph read everything I could get my hands on. Some of the material exposed the findings of the fake "missing links." To supplement his research Joseph began to study everything his Russian Bible had to say about the existence of a Creator.

For a while, he was either calling on the phone or dropping in at our apartment at least once a week. Full of questions. Endless questions.

One afternoon he came over very upset, furious in fact. He paced the floor. "How could the Soviet government tell us that evolution was a proven science, when it is only a theory! And a far-fetched one, at that! How could they have deceived us for so many years! And then they had us teachers pass the lie on to our students." He was devastated.

But good came out of his disillusionment. With his former faith and foundation destroyed, Joseph was now ready to find a new foundation, a new faith. He read the Bible voraciously. One Sunday morning, at the close of the worship service, he publicly professed Christ.

Joseph painted portraits for a living. But, when we were getting ready to leave Germany permanently, he painted an Alpine landscape – his first – as a farewell gift to us. That was 60 years ago. Today, his original hangs in our living room and reminds us that even a simple painting has to have a creator. ◇◇