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A group of communist European nations was on my heart and in my mind. From where was this burden coming? I had never been to Europe before; I hadn't even thought about going to Europe. So why was it suddenly consuming so much of my thoughts?

I soon realized that this burden was from the Lord. While I was a student at Columbia International University I began to pray for the Soviet Bloc, asking God to allow me to invest my life where there was great openness to the gospel but little opportunity to hear. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, I had the chance to take a short-term mission trip to Ukraine – a trip that I learned about through CIU. My heart for the world expanded through that trip and my studies at CIU. I came back to the United States and asked our church to pray about sending my family to serve as its first missionaries.

As I finished seminary, my family's excitement for missions grew. Upon graduation, our church sent us to Ukraine as pioneer missionaries. What we originally planned to be two years in Ukraine quickly turned into 10 years of church planting, leadership development, and work with orphans and missionary kids. We witnessed the advance of God's Kingdom as He allowed us to form eternal relationships with people like Andre, Viola, Sasha, and Zoiya who were indeed living in a part of the world with openness to the gospel but with few opportunities to hear it.

My vision and passion for missions were developed during my time at CIU, largely due to the influence of the faculty and staff. The school's motto **"To know Him and to make Him known"** has become my personal motto as my family and I have returned to the United States, still faithful to fulfilling the Great Commission through our sending church. And it all started with a burden for a place I'd never been to located on the other side of the world!

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