



Victory in Surrender

How big of a wake-up call does God need to give you before you submit to Him?
How about getting arrested by the KGB?

2 Stanford Students Seized by Russians



Soviets say they arrested Californians James Kratzer (left) and Larry Watson on Russian-Polish border

October 2014

By Brother Larry Watson

Although these events took place over 40 years ago, I have never written about them before until today. The main reason is because, although they were profoundly life changing, they were also painfully traumatic; but I hope that my testimony is an inspiration to you.

Good Seed, No Root

In 1966, I was applying for college. I'm ashamed to admit that I wasn't really seeking the Lord's direction, nor for that matter, my parents'. My decision to attend Stanford University was met by mixed feelings, which I understand much better now that I'm a parent. Don't get me wrong. I received a wonderful education, which I still value highly today; however, I didn't have a support system there to help anchor me when

my faith and moral compass were challenged.

I rejected acceptance letters from colleges closer to home because I wanted to put some distance between me and my parents (as well as the Church). Why? Like the prophet Jonah, I was already on the run, only I didn't know it. One week before leaving, I asked for my baptism. But, unfortunately, the good seed that was planted that day would not develop deep enough roots to withstand what was coming.

It was the height of the Cold War, and many universities throughout the nation were hotbeds of unrest. My friends and I, who opposed the Vietnam War, thought we were more "enlightened" than the generation before us. Fundamentally, though, this struggle went far deeper than the war.

In many ways, it was a rerun of the familiar struggle of man's will against divine authority and transcendent moral standards. Many of us would have agreed with the lyrics of a popular contemporary song: "It can't be wrong when it feels so right."

The Trip

While attending college in Europe in 1968, I decided to travel with friends to Russia on a side trip. My Dad begged me not to go, but I wouldn't listen.

At that time, it was unusual for American tourists to be given a Soviet visa but, for reasons that would become apparent later, we were selected to be their "guests." What we didn't know was that we were under continuous surveillance the moment we crossed the Russian border. We drove all the way to Moscow in a bright red convertible,

attracting lots of attention wherever we went. Blissfully ignorant of the paranoid communist mindset in the totalitarian regime, we toured the sights as though we hadn't a care in the world.

So, when we visited the American Embassy and then (out of curiosity) the Embassy of the People's Republic of China — a major adversary of the Soviets — the Russians concluded that their original suspicions were true. Behind the walls of the Kremlin, they began spinning a web to ensnare us.

Of course, we had no idea of this behind-the-scenes drama, but is this really that different from the conflict we face every day? The one that we don't see because it takes place in a spiritual dimension? Paul says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities ... powers ... the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The Trap

The trap began innocently enough. We were approached by a group of English-speaking Russian students claiming to be pro-American who invited us to their home, where they offered us wooden icons (with religious paintings on them) as gifts. They cautioned us to hide them at the border or they would be confiscated. We ignored the seemingly obvious red flags and did as they suggested.

On our return trip home, I began to feel the Spirit of God fill that old jalopy we were driving. Little did I know when I began to sing "Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul" that was the theme song of the Nauvoo campout, which was taking place that very day back in the States.

When we arrived at the border, the KGB, the Soviet Secret Police, was waiting. Yours truly, who prided himself for being cool under pressure, had a meltdown when they apprehended us. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that we were being threatened with 10 to 15 years of imprisonment unless we "confessed" to being American spies.

The Test

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt completely helpless? That's how I felt. I couldn't talk to a lawyer, my parents, or the American Embassy. For the first time in my life, I was completely alone. We were confined to separate quarters at a hotel. They told me during intense interrogation that my friend had already confessed, and if I too pled guilty, then they would lighten our sentence. Of course, I knew this was false because we were not spies!

When they finally reunited us after a few days apart, I discovered my friend had hidden a Bible in the lining of his coat. All of a sudden, a book for which I had no time and in which I placed no value, was by far the greatest treasure we could possibly have been given.

On the fifth day, the Soviets notified American officials that we were being held. They contacted my parents, but, unfortunately, not

before they had seen my face on the 6 o'clock news. Heartbroken, they turned to the saints, who immediately went into prayer on our behalf.

Meanwhile, back at the border, they told us they'd arranged a televised press conference for the following day. We were told what the questions would be and also what the answers needed to be if we wanted to avoid a public trial. They wanted us to make statements that would incriminate the United States and ourselves.

That was the longest night of my life. When we awoke the following day, we both felt the same way (one of my friends had already flown home from Moscow) — we would tell the truth and trust the Lord for the rest. They led us into a room packed with Russian journalists. By the grace of God, after our interview, they decided to release us. We realized later that, had we made the so-called confession they'd demanded, we would have given them the very "evidence" they needed to send us to prison for a long time.

When we got to Warsaw, the Chief Consulate there said, "You boys are very lucky," telling us that many others in similar circumstances did not get out of the country for many years — and sometimes they were never seen again. We knew it was more than luck.

The Escape

The Consulate told us we weren't out of danger yet and warned us to get out of Poland fast, so we made a mad dash for the border. On our way there, we saw Russian troops massing on the frontier preparing for an imminent invasion of Czechoslovakia, a nation that was desperately trying to escape Soviet oppression. As we discussed our



Brother Larry on left

plans for exposing the truth about what had happened to us, we saw a truck pass us and speed ahead to the border. We then realized our car had been bugged, and we were once again in trouble.

As our desperation to escape grew, the clouds darkened, and we were deluged by a major downpour. Unfortunately, the roof of the car leaked, and water began to collect on the floor. So, while my friend drove, I was bailing water as fast as I could out the car door — and you wonder why I have no hair today?!

We made it to the border late that night, where they were, again, waiting for us. Incredibly, by the grace of God, they questioned us and let us go. When we got home, whatever hopes we had for downplaying our arrest were quickly dispelled as we saw our picture on the front page of several major newspapers the next day. The press, including Time magazine, called to interview us.

The Second Escape

You'd think that a wake-up call like that would be enough to ring my bell, but you'd only be half-right. Don't misunderstand — I was grateful to be back home, but, in reality, I was still in bondage. You see, although I recognized Jesus Christ as my Savior, **I continued to reject Him as my Lord.** It would take two more years before I finally came to the end of myself.

The turning point came after I had gone to a party at a friend's house on New Year's Eve. The next day, I began to seriously ponder how the choices I'd made hurt the people I loved; and I asked myself why? It was then that I recognized the existence of an evil power, one that deceives us and uses the

temptations of the world and weakness of our flesh to our demise. I realized I wasn't really free at all.

Days later, the night before I was to move back north to continue school, my dad, who I greatly loved, came into my room to ask if he could pray with me. Words cannot express what happened to me next, except to say that the final remnants of the wall I had built around my heart came crashing down.

When he finished, then I began to pray, and as I wept from the depths of my soul in repentance, I finally raised the white flag.

Oh, how I'd been deceived! The very act that I thought would lead me into bondage had, in fact, set me free and given me unspeakable joy and peace. I then decided to attend graduate school nearer home and the Church.

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How about you? Have you experienced the victory in surrender? Are you still wrestling with the Lord over who sits in the driver's seat? When you pray, do you really seek God's will — or are you simply looking for Him to validate what you plan to do anyway? I urge you to discover the truth in the lyrics of a song by Michael Card:

*For the power of **paradox** opens
your eyes
And blinds those who say they
can see*



MR. AND MRS. Robert A. Watson of Northridge, Calif., look at a picture of their son, Larry, who was arrested with a companion, James Kratzer, in the Soviet-Polish border town of Brest. Russian officials accused the youths of trying to smuggle out anti-Soviet literature provided by the Chinese embassy in Moscow. Mrs. Watson told newsmen she was heartbroken. Her husband said "I can't believe he has done anything unlawful." (AP Wirephoto)

Get Some Roots

Brother Larry says, "I didn't have a support system to anchor me when my faith and moral compass were challenged." **If you feel this way, stay connected to God and the church!**

One way to do this is to visit thechurchofjesuschrist.org/ssp to sign up for live online hangouts where you can study scripture with other young people from around the church.