



BY SARAH BENDER

AFTER MONTHS OF PREPARATION through team meetings, fundraising, and missions training—there we stood in the main square of Nuremberg, Germany. We were worn out from the 12-hour flight, and for the first time in my life I knew what jet lag felt like.

In the previous months, we had our team do research presentations on German history, culture and religion. They gave many hours of their time in order to raise support, by serving people in the community. We went through seventy-two hours of missions training with them, during which they learned much about selflessness, servant hood and hard work—we grew into a family. Many transformations took place during those three months, but nothing we did in preparation for this trip could have readied them for what they were about to do.

The World Cup was taking place in Germany, and Nuremberg was a party city. I am not sure I had ever seen so many intoxicated, loud, chaotic people in one place at the same time. Luke 10:3 came to mind: "...behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves." Some of these kids had never flown on a plane before, let alone wander the streets of a foreign

country to talk to wild, drunken strangers about Jesus.

A disc jockey from our home church drew a rally in the square with sounds of hip-hop, while our students mixed with the crowd. They wore oversized, bright-yellow traffic vests with thick reflector stripes around the sides. Across the back, "JESUS" was printed in big, black letters and they could be spotted from just about any distance. Our YWAM mission contacts told us they needed to be worn so the students wouldn't get "re-evangelized", I thought of them as cloaks of humility. Just when my fellow leaders and I were wondering when we might be heading back to the church for a long-awaited night of rest, one of our contacts approached us carrying a box; it appeared to be somewhat heavy. "Load up your students with these tracks and send them out to give them away. Start conversations with people."

At first, they timidly handed the tracks to people passing by without saying a word, and most would look down at it. They wore expressions that said "What do you think I am, stupid?" then they would go about their way. Others would read "JESUS" across their backs and automatically start mocking. One man saw my vest and shouted to everyone within earshot,

"Shaun Du! Jesus ist eine Frou!" which means, "Look! Jesus is a woman!"

When the night was over, several tracks had been handed out (many to later be found laying in the cobblestone streets), and few conversations had been held. Many of the students were discouraged, and all of them were beginning to see this trip was not going to be what they had expected.

On day two, Holland was playing in the World Cup and many of their native fans were visiting. We found the Hollanders spoke better English than German, and that the majority of them liked to cause trouble. Our students would set themselves up on street corners to perform the dramas they had learned at missions training. If a crowd gathered, one of them would step forward and give their testimony as soon as the drama ended (with the help of a translator), while others would hand out tracks to those listening. There were usually only a handful of people who would stop to observe the drama, and they would disperse before the student sharing their testimony could finish a sentence. The Hollanders would stand there, yelling and blowing their obnoxious horns. One of them attempted to hit one of our girls on the head with a blow-up hammer, but he was too drunk to even hold his balance.



Hours later, another day ended with sore feet, heat exhaustion, and tears of frustration.

When the team that evening, the students expressed feelings of disappointment and thoughts of "What is the point of what we're doing? Are we even making a difference?" They had expectations of a great, visible move of God. It was a good time to discuss planting seeds and spiritual warfare.

"Planting seeds"... it may sound cliché, but these kids were doing just that. I doubt a person could easily forget a run-in with some

high school student from another country who spent their whole summer working hard to raise thousands of dollars, just to fly to Germany and talk to unwelcoming people about this "Jesus" whom they so love. What a contrast compared to the religion they are familiar with! The church in Germany is dead, and anything remaining is nothing but legalism and religiosity that holds little meaning to anyone. Certainly nothing they would be so passionate about as these teenagers. "...Who is *their* Jesus?" a seed is planted. Not to mention the hours spent in prayer for the country and the people in it. These kids literally invested in that place, with their money, their time, their prayers, and their serving.

“LOOK! JESUS IS A WOMAN!”

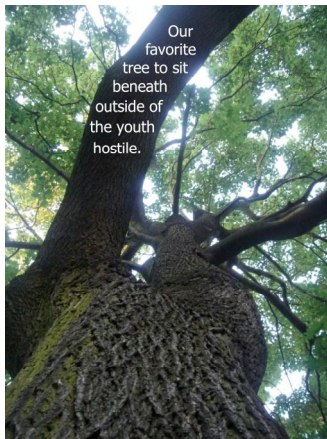
Then there's the element of spiritual warfare, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood..." (Eph. 6:12) Even if we were to witness with our eyes some great movement of God, nothing would be lasting without engaging in battle, cutting into the roots of what is unseen. Whatever impact we were to make in the spiritual atmosphere while there would cause a ripple effect reaching all the way into eternity, whether seen in the physical or not.

We watched as the students went from despairing to driven. They possessed more and more of God's love for these people, and this love cast out all fear in their hearts. They were no longer fazed by the jeers and heckling. They prayed over streets, buildings and people; whether they be those they met, passerbies, or those who cursed them. They sang unhindered praise to God in parks, streets and sidewalks. I can still see the look of wonder on people's faces as they listened to the zeal in those singing voices.

For the rest of our stay in Nuremberg, we spent most of the daytime hours doing friendship evangelism in parks, initiating soccer and ultimate Frisbee games with the locals. During the evenings, we would spend time with people at the nearby youth hostile. This was the team's particular favorite place to visit. To get to it, there was a great hill we had to scale; we all had to catch our breath once we reached the top. By our second visit, people were hanging

out the windows waving and yelling excitedly as we were on our way up. I'll never forget the night my co-leaders and I were sitting beneath a great big tree down the hill a bit from the hostile. While the students were in the courtyard mingling with the residents, we were praying for them and the people they were ministering to. The air was filled with the sounds of the kids performing their dramas, friendly conversations, guitars strumming and joyful voices singing. I have always enjoyed culture, music and laughter, but it is a completely different experience when the freedom and love of God is behind it all. It is even more incredible when that love is fueling teenagers in their abandonment to reach the lost.

It is difficult to sum up this two-week outreach in a few pages of writing. There are scores of stories; some hilarious, some sobering, some indescribable. Our team learned so much, including us leaders. We learned handy wipes are more than handy when going several days at a time without showering. We learned the ten p.m. noise curfew is strictly enforced, and breaking it results in a visit from the police. We learned it really isn't that hard to talk to strangers about Jesus. We learned that while our own expectations will let us down, God has a greater journey in mind, and He is always faithful to carry it through.



When it was all over, these students had led many people to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ. I had never seen them more ecstatic. Yet they were still honored to be used by God when others refused them, and even when carrying out the simplest of tasks.

...GOD HAS A GREATER JOURNEY IN MIND...

About a week after returning home, we got an interesting report from the small church we helped in Nuremberg. This was one of the very few Christian churches operating in Germany. It was slowly fading and had given up on anything that had to do with outreach, thinking it was hopeless. "But we saw a bunch of your high school students, who didn't know a lick of German, come in with boldness and preach the Gospel. We saw that even through rejection and obstacles, they still praised God and warred in prayer everywhere they went. We watched people

receive healing as those kids prayed over them, and we witnessed the most unexpected people ask Jesus to take over their hearts and lives. We now see we have no excuse not to rise up and go out. Thank you for showing us it can be done, and reminding us that God is worthy."

ISAIAH 59:10 — IF YOU EXTEND YOUR SOUL TO THE HUNGRY AND SATISFY THE AFFLICTED SOUL, THEN YOUR LIGHT SHALL DAWN IN THE DARKNESS, AND YOUR DARKNESS SHALL BE AS THE NOONDAY.



Written by Sarah Bender October 2006

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