

FROM PREJUDICE



I AM BULGARIAN. I was born and raised in a loving family and had a wonderful childhood. Both of my parents are very well educated with good professions, so getting a good education was the number one priority in our family. I made it into the best kindergarten and schools. In this environment, I communicated with children just like me: white and coming from similar families. I never had any Roma classmates. When I saw beggars down in the center of the town, I always wondered why they were so dirty and begging. I thought that these were low class people and I should not communicate with them.

I had no interaction with Roma people at all until I became a believer. When I accepted Christ at age 17, I saw some of these “different” people in the church sitting among Bulgarians and worshipping God together. At the end of each service, people greeted each other with a kiss and handshake. I did not greet the Roma, because I had a very deep prejudice toward them without even realizing it. Two years went by quickly and I ended up at a university in the big city. The church there had fewer Roma and consequently I felt fine.

In my senior year, I was offered a job as a coordinator of the compassionate ministries at our church. I felt God was clearly leading me toward that and I felt His presence and peace about my decision to

take the job. My very first project was at one of the Roma schools in the country. The first time we went there I was unprepared for the interest and love of the students. By the end of our visit they all wanted to come and hug us. That experience completely shocked me. I tried several times to pull myself away and leave the school, but the crowd of children was too “demanding.” That night I had serious turmoil in my heart. I felt convicted for my earlier behavior and realized that I had a serious problem. I asked Jesus for forgiveness and a change of heart. This did not happen suddenly. Month after month I went to the school and met with these children and their families. I started to listen more attentively and learn about their culture. I was invited to family gatherings and my appreciation for their culture and traditions grew with every single event. The love for their families and their hospitality—even to strangers—were things I have not seen anywhere else.

Today, some of my closest friends are Roma. I am a pastor of three Roma churches and still teach at this Roma school. I can only thank God for His mercy and love and bravely say that everything is possible with God—even changing the depths of our hearts and minds where prejudice and other unrighteous habits are deeply rooted. With Him we can overcome everything!

BY **ZHANETA GEORGIEVA**

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