

## A Journey from the Streets to a New Home

**This is part one of the story about a young man named Zhenya. Next month we will share part two of his remarkable journey from the basements of Kyiv to God's redeeming love.**

*Note from Jeff - Often times we share the love of God with the poor, with widows and orphans, yet we do not get to see the results. Sometimes we are simply planting seeds and this side of Heaven will never know the impact of obeying God's word by helping the poor.*

*As I visited with Zhenya and his wife Ivanna, I asked his permission to publish his story. He was more than willing. Despite the pain he experienced as a child, he hopes others will be encouraged by what God has done in his life. We are so thankful for MP sponsors who make stories like this possible. Your financial support and your prayers make a difference; and next month, we will see how God redeems the pain of Zhenya's life. Zhenya, a former street-kid from Kyiv, tells this story in his own words.*

### Zhenya's Testimony

My father was a worker at Chernobyl. I was born in 1988, two years after the explosion. Our family was evacuated from Chernobyl. My parents were not registered as a married couple, which means they were not legally married. As a result, when they were relocated, they were not given an apartment together.

My parents were separated and my father was not interested in the family anymore. We didn't see him anymore and my mother started drinking. She changed apartments so my father could not find us. She was afraid of him.

When she changed apartments my mother was tricked by a Gypsy family. She was an alcoholic and allowed different gypsy people to live in our small apartment. There were three of us boys and I was the youngest. We lived in a gypsy community and they would steal from us and beat us. They lived in one room of our two room apartment. We suffered a lot of physical abuse.

Zhenya sobs uncontrollably at the table while his wife Ivanna rubs his back. He tells the children to leave and go play. I offer to break it off but he insists on continuing. Somehow we all feel like it is a healing moment as he shares his pain. We cannot imagine the horror of his experience. He was seven years old when this started.



30-year-old Zhenya with Ivanna and their kids.



Zhenya and his son barbecuing "shashlik" before telling his story.

“This is why I went to the orphanage and then to the foster family. I don’t mind talking about it,” he says.

When I was 10-years-old, my older brother Sasha and I decided to leave and live in Kyiv on the streets. We became street children but it was a better life then in the apartment. Sasha was 13-years-old and he was trying to protect me and himself. We lived in a basement under a high rise apartment building. There were about 40 children living down there. Most of them sniffed glue which made the hunger pains go away. About five of us didn’t use glue. There are many rooms in these basements and we separated ourselves from the kids using glue.



Zhenya, in the back, at home around 11-years-old.

I interrupted to ask why he didn’t use glue.

“I don’t know why I did not want to use glue, but I think God was protecting me. We would sing and dream about a normal life and about going to school and having a family. I really wanted to go to school,” he said.

### The Police Arrive

Someone called the police and told them children were living in the basement. The first room the police visited was our room. They started mocking us, making fun of us, and one of them put his gun in my brother’s mouth. They would beat us up and leave us there. We were afraid of the police but somehow we had to eat. They came several times to beat us up, hoping we would leave.

*“One of them put a gun in my brother’s mouth”*

Zhenya pauses and says, “I think God protected me when a chief of police came, pointed his finger to me and said, ‘don’t touch this little one.’ He gave me a loaf of bread and told me to just run away.”

They beat my brother on his face with the gun. The police were brutal. We slept there at night but stole things during the day. We were not safe on the street or with the police, so we returned to our apartment, not knowing what to expect.

My brother and I would protect ourselves at night, and then go beg for food from the neighbors during the day. If a family was generous, the word would spread and many street kids would go there. One day, all 40 of us went to the house of Mr. Vlad Bitulski. He insisted that we must return to our families. God touched his heart and he eventually invited my brother and me to move in with his family. I was 11 and for the first time felt safe. It was a new feeling. They told us about Jesus and we found God.



Zhenya (R) at the home of Vlad Bitulski with other street children. This Christian family saved his and his brother’s life.

**Part 2 continues next month. Your support makes an eternal difference in the lives of at-risk children.**