

INSTEAD OF A THANK YOU NOTE

Texas Lutheran University:

How the "Called to Make a Difference" Make a Difference

By

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Dreaming knows no limits. Dedication to pursue dreams is courage of unimaginable strength. It is that force which pushes you even when you feel you're standing before an impassable concrete wall. But, where does such a force come from? Where is dedication based? From where does such courage emerge? *Faith*. So many questions, yet just one simple, five-letter word answer. Faith. Now, there are different kinds of people living in our world. Some of them are dedicated believers and some are not. Some believe, and some don't. But, how can you have faith in dreams? Aren't they just dreams, after all, and far from reality? Moreover, you cannot practically see or touch or feel or taste your dreams. They're abstract for all we know. And, yet "*blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe*" (John 20:29). Believing is about having faith. Faith in what you don't see – now, that's pretty tough for some to come to good terms with. Yet, "*he who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much*" (Luke 16:10). But, what does faith mean? Trust, assurance, conviction, reliance. And who can better possess all these attributes than the Almighty? Faith in God. Faith in the Lord is the faith, which never fails you. It is exactly what faith means – trust, assurance, conviction, and reliance. You can trust Him. You can be assured His will will happen. Your conviction comes from His holiness. And, you can rely on Him now and forever – the one power that never ceases existing.

When I came to the United States in late 2001, after having gone through the Kosova War of 1998-99, and afterwards having worked with the US Army peacekeepers till mid-2001, I did not have much with me. Better said, I had nothing – but my dreams. And, as impossible as my dreams to go to school in America – get an undergrad degree and then also get a grad degree – seemed in 2001, I did not give up. Why? Faith. As hard as my surviving in this vast unknown country seemed, I had faith in my pursuit of dreams. At that time I certainly felt like a lost goose in the middle of nowhere. But, I knew deep in my heart that good things don't come easily. And, more importantly, I kept my faith in God as my shepherd and let Him lead my way. Sure enough, He is all-wise. He took me under His wings and showed me the path towards making my dreams come true. Along the way, the Almighty paved my road to success by using the people who were ready to serve in His name.

First came Chad Tiller of New Braunfels, a U.S. soldier I met while working in Kosova – just like a God-sent angel to put me in the right place at the right time. Thanks to Chad, connections were made to help me get started on my U.S. education. Then came Mr and Mrs Bill Kenyon of Wilmington, DE, who opened their house to me. Just weeks later, the blessings grew further. Along came Pastor Jim and Judy Hinkhouse (now, my T-Dad and T-Mom respectively; T – for Texas), both alumni of TLU. And, their home became my home. Their family became my family. And, the members of Kinsmen Lutheran Church became my kin, too. And, later on, as inspiration to my dedication to help Kosova, came former US Congressman Joe DioGuardi and Mrs Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi, who have been, for over fifteen years, front-runners of bringing peace and justice to Kosova and all Albanians in the Balkans (more on www.aacl.com). But, above all, my faith became a faith in God more than in anything else. My faith in the Lord grew so much greater than I could have ever imagined. Only then, in early March 2002, after a few weeks in Houston did I understand the true meaning of my uneasy journey from a war-devastated country into a land of opportunities. I was here. I was safe.

Yet, the amazing blessings of God Almighty did not stop. They kept coming. I kept believing and they kept coming. As my faith in my dreams grew, so did the blessings of the Lord. And, this is when Texas Lutheran University stepped forward. In April 2002, I was offered admission and a full-tuition scholarship to attend TLU. During the time I spent at TLU until May 2005 when I graduated with a BS in Computer Science and a BA in Math, my faith kept growing. Blessings from the Lord kept coming – what wonderful people I met, what great friends I made, what understandings I absorbed. On the first day at TLU, I met a guy named Denis Manevski. I thought to myself, why is it that even here, in Seguin, I get to see a Slav. Denis, being a Macedonian (a Slav – to me the same creed as the Serbs, who had, just a few

years before, committed genocide against my Albanian people in Kosova), was in the list of people I hated. Yes, indeed. I barely shook hands with him. How ignorant I was, for - *"if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same"* (Luke 6:32-33). But, God can do miracles, and He did – *"I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:45). Denis today is one of my best friends ever. I sincerely love him as a brother. I care about him and his family. Their being Macedonians or Slavs or whatever makes no difference anymore. My heart is cured. My hatred is gone. Instead, respect and love have flourished.

Still I keep walking along the path my glorious shepherd has chosen for me. To my great surprise, I was admitted to the most rigorous program at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, to pursue my Master's in Public Administration and International Development, where I have been since August 2005. And, as I retrospectively look into my past – I see nothing but miracles from the Lord. My dreams came true. I earned a quality American education from TLU, not just a degree, and now I am at Harvard. Was I satisfied though? No, I wasn't. As my dreams came true, my faith grew. And, I kept asking for more – human nature, I guess. This time around though not for me, but for other sheep out there in my beloved Kosova. I wanted them to be guided by my shepherd, too. And, into life came the Education for Peace Scholarships Program (www.bislimi.org) hosted by TLU, which granted three full-tuition and one half-tuition scholarships for four young talented Kosovars who are now already students at TLU. I asked TLU to help with this program through scholarships simply because I felt the call to be in service to others. I have received so much from God so far and just wanted to share some of the blessings with others, so that they can do the same with others. TLU is helping build a peaceful and prosperous future for Kosova through quality education. TLU is making a difference in Kosova in the best way possible. And, Kosovars will be thankful forever.

Now, some could just claim that my journey of faith in America has been simply good luck and coincidence. But, I choose to believe it was faith rather than luck, blessings rather than coincidences. I know that only the Lord could have prepared such a make-dreams-come-true journey for me. No earthly luck and no lottery could have given me all the blessings I have had so far. I am a young plant growing in a garden of good soil. I am surrounded with love and care, faith and support. And, the garden of good soil where my roots are undoubtedly consists of Texas Lutheran University and Kinsmen Lutheran Church, and my roots are my T-parents. No lottery and no luck could have brought me into this wonderful family and TLU's faithful community and Kinsmen's caring congregation. Even if I had been able to choose where to go, my choice would have probably been poorer than the one that God made for me by bringing me to the Hinkhouses and TLU. And, He said -- *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you"* (John 15:16). I cannot but feel exhilarated about my journey in faith and my being chosen to be one of your alumni. And, you – TLU community – helped me when I most needed help. I am where I am today simply because of my roots being in good soil. And, because of my shepherd choosing my path in this life. What a difference you have made in my life, and what a difference you are and will be making in the lives of the four Kosovar students attending TLU now. Your love, care, support, and generosity have been the best ingredients for my growth as a person, and as a believer. What better way is there to make a difference in this world than to spread the word about the Kingdom of Heaven through promising seeds sowed in good soil?

My thanking you is worthless. My kneeling in front of you is worthless. My crying in gratitude before you is worthless. You have done too much for me to be able to humanly thank you. Therefore, I thank the Lord, and leave it to Him to thank you by answering your prayers. After all, it is only He who we all praise.

God bless you all!

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