

The Swedish Johnsons...



October 03, 2011 (Our 19th Anniversayr!)

Our family is experiencing our first August/September in the U.S. since 1998, which means this is the first 9/11 remembrance day we have experienced from this side of the Atlantic. It evoked several emotions in our minds. The most important one is the freedom we are currently experiencing to raise and educate our children in the "fear and admonition (padeia) of the Lord". It is a necessary freedom worth defending. The alternatives attack the heart of the Great Commission. Our difficulties in Sweden with government interference and regulation provide a stark contrast for our family to appreciate what remembering 9/11 is about.



Gary & Linda Johnson

Daniel 17, Joel 15, Rebekah 14
Jan-Mikael 12, Benjamin 11,
Sarah 8, Nathanael Baillie 7,
Elisabeth 5, Leah 3, Jeremiah 2
David Josiah 1



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Joel, Brock, Alberto, Daniel, Mattias

As mentioned in the July update, our week in Czech Republic consisted of meeting two different Swedish youth teams and joining them for two tournaments there. Linda and I were able to stay in the same hotel with the Swedish, German, and Dutch teams, which provided an opportunity to meet with Swedish youth and European coaches that I have interacted with for over 20 years. My sons Joel and Jan-Mikael, both Swedish citizens, competed for the Swedish Cadet National Team in the European Championships in Brno. Their mission was to be salt and light and to play with all their might to the glory of God. They were the only professing Christians on the Swedish team. Daniel was asked to help by throwing batting practice, so he got a uniform!



Daniel, Jan-Mikael, Joel, Gary, David

God used Czech Republic week to remind me of His faithfulness in my previous sports and exchange student ministry prior to focusing on church planting in Sweden.

For example, the first morning at the hotel I almost choked on my bagel to see Georg Bull leading the German youth in a pre-game pep talk as head coach. Back in 1993 Sweden hosted the European Championships in baseball. Through my previous clinics in German clubs I had the opportunity to live in the hotel with the German team and offer a bible study to the players in the down time. Among the few German players who attended was then German National catcher Georg Bull. He asked the most questions and made sure we would meet again. In 1996 Georg visited us in our Jackson, Mississippi home to observe our placement of German youth while I was in seminary and Director of International Student Affairs at Belhaven University.



Georg is also the director of the "Deutsche Baseball Akademie" in Paderborn. Georg and I shook hands on an endeavor to partner for arranging for his German students to come to the U.S. for school and baseball. He agreed to my emphasis of placement in Christian homes and schools. Though he doesn't personally believe he admits German kids generally lack understanding of the classic Christian message he heard from me years ago, and agrees that youth could benefit to at least "think about religion".

Sweden Angels: CHAMPIONS!

As the Swedish Cadets were wrapping up the Cadet European Championship in Brno, our Angels were arriving from Sweden to compete in the Invitational Tournament three hours to the north in Liberec. This was a reunion for Daniel and Joel with the guys they grew up with in Sweden. The Angels came from the loser's bracket and two days of constant rain to win it all! The big upset was ousting the defending champions from North Carolina in the semi-finals. The Angels then beat the top Czech junior team Prague Eagles in the final.



Angels vs. Prague Eagles in the final

Even the two days of rain proved to be a key to the mission: *live and speak the truth of Scripture that every opportunity allows.* Rain allowed for more team gatherings than usual. There Alberto from Stockholm grew in his interest in the Christian faith and let his father know upon return to Sweden his desire to be a Christian to come to a Christian school Fall 2012. *Pray for Alberto.* Libor (left), is an Evangelical-reformed believer who hosted the tournament and showed an evangelistic film during one of the rain delays. He has a vision for church planting via baseball outreach in Cescke Budejvice.



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The providential rain also benefitted me in another way: the fields were so wet in Liberec that a full day of the tournament was moved to Prague. Between 1985-89 I made several trips to what was then Czechoslovakia to engage in sports evangelism “behind the iron Curtain”. I eventually made arrangements for four Czech student-athletes to attend Christian schools in America. I came to find out that my investment was not forgotten. During those missions I always stayed with families, which gave me unique insight into life in the Communist Bloc. Pictured to the left are two of my hosts: the Zika and the Vavrusa families. Jan (center back) and his mother Mrs. Zikova (front right) were wonderful hosts on visits from Sweden 1987-89. During that time I helped arrange for Jan’s sister Alena to come to Belhaven University in Jackson, Mississippi on a basketball scholarship.

Tomas, (back right), and his wife Helena (front left) also came to visit during the games in Prague. From our conversation I understood that Tomas had over the years trusted in Christ!. Furthermore he had placed his son Daniel in a Christian school in Arizona. Daniel recently signed a contract with the NY Yankees organization. Perhaps I will be privileged to help arrange hosts in America for his younger son Jirka (back left)

The next day in Jablonec came the Podzimkova family, another host whom I had lived with in 1985 while competing and conducting baseball clinics. Jan and Katerina were leaders in the baseball club we served. Jan was tragically killed four years ago in a skiing accident. In his place this visit was his strapping 16 year old son Jakub, who is a spitting image of Jan. It was a sad but sweet reunion as Katerina explained how the loss of Jan has affected her life. It was only appropriate for me to offer to help with her son, including offering placement in a Christian host family and school as this is his dream for the future. Please pray for this dear family.



Linda, David, Jakub, Katerina

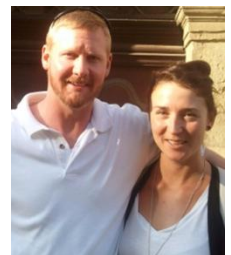
Sweden: July 25- August 1

After our week in Czech Republic we flew to Sweden to continue research on future ministry partnerships. We met with several Swedes who gave us insight on the southwestern portion of Sweden. It was encouraging to be back in Sweden and receive a warm reception from family and friends we did not often get to see while fully engaged in Tranås church planting. Linda and I were reminded that we have a role within the culture, as we understand the nuances of life there. However, after our school research we feel we did not make significant progress on educational options for our children now that home school is banned nationwide. I will return to Sweden next week for continue the search. ***My next update with outline details of our Sweden research for future ministry. Pray for guidance!***

September 18-27 Turkey, Germany, Denmark, Sweden

On September 18 I was off again to Izmir (Smyrna) and Ephesus ,Turkey for a MTW leadership gathering with world-wide national partners. This was a particularly important meeting as MTW Europe is going through a redesign process that has direct implication on our family and future ministry. *Pray for MTW Europe leadership.*

After the MTW conference I stopped over in Regensburg Germany to celebrate the marriage of one of my former Sweden interns Daniel Husband to Vivien from Regensburg. Daniel aspires to Christian witness through baseball In Bavaria. We schemed to “finding faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2) in that region of Europe. *Pray for Daniel and Vivien in their new union !*



Daniel and Vivien

September 24-27th I was in Copenhagen to meet and preach to a group of Farsi-speaking immigrants who want to start a church in that key Scandinavian city just across the bay from Sweden. They have asked me to consider not only helping them start in Copenhagen, but also help duplicate a similar church across the bay bridge in Malmö Sweden. The first step was meeting each other. On Monday Sept 26 I taught a group of Danish Christians and received a surprisingly positive response. *Please pray for immigrants to Southern Sweden and Copenhagen*
Thank you for your support and prayers that make this mission possible!

