

A LIFE OF MISSION



Birmingham, Ala., native Kathleen Wintter has spent nearly 19 1/2 years in Timisoara, Romania as a missionary. The last three of those years she has served and taught English to U.N. refugees at the Emergency Transit Center (ETC). The refugees only stay until they are relocated to a more permanent home, so Wintter often has half a year or less to invest in their lives, a high turnover rate that challenges her to rely on God with a beautifully bold faith.

Q: Can you tell us a little about your work?

I've been there for 19 1/2 years. I've done a variety of things. I've taught Bible studies for women, initially. I've taught English classes to Romanians as a way of building relationships; that was what I did for a long time. My background is as a teacher and a guidance counselor. Then almost three years ago I began teaching refugees English. With my history, training and experience teaching English – and I was free – they were glad for me to come and teach them. They don't know I'm a missionary per se; [the staff] just think I'm a good person.

Q: What does a typical day-in-the-life look like in your ministry?

I have classes usually from 3-5 in the afternoon. Most of [my students] are from Iraq and depending on the level, I might help them learn the English alphabet, work on numbers, work

on writing... We might work on the most commonly used words in English. Depending on who is there and how they feel, I may or may not be invited to come eat a meal with them.

I am the only person besides staff who is allowed to take them out of the compound, so I take them out on social visits sometimes. I take them to church if they are willing to go. I have a ministry group that I work with who are mostly English teachers and we have a conversation club once a month so I may take them out to that. My church has a ministry to international students and they have activities sometimes. So it's not just 3-5 or 1-5. I don't plan anything on Fridays because, being a lot of Muslims, they go to mosque.

Q: How much do you get to share your faith with them?

I MENTION GOD OR
JESUS AT EVERY
OPPORTUNITY.

Most of the people do not speak English very well, but I've been fortunate to have somebody from their group

who speaks English well enough to translate for me.

Q: What sparked your heart for missions?

God put it in my heart so many years ago without me even knowing it. I'm a twin and our mother was killed when I was 10 1/2. She told my aunt long ago that one of us had told her that she was going to be a missionary when she grew up. Neither my sister nor I was a believer, but as a child, one of us – I think it was probably me – thought she was going to be a missionary. I became a believer just before I turned 15 on Valentine's Day.

I got my masters at the University of Alabama and started working in Georgia. I was free in the summers so I worked at Christian camps. I heard about our pastor's daughter that was going to Japan for a whole year right out of college so I thought "well, I can go somewhere for a summer." I loved French in high school and college, so I thought "this is a way I'll get to go to a French-speaking country. I'll just go as a missionary and do a good thing for God."

So I went to Belgium in 1982. God transformed my life. A year later, I went back for a year. I learned French during the summer before I joined a team in October. It was just what I wanted to do.

They used to have a program called "Love Europe" where they would have thousands of mostly college

students meet for a week of training – intense concentrated training – and they would go out into Europe. I was usually the one who either gave my testimony or shared the Gospel. Then I'd be irritated with the team because they weren't interacting with the people. One day one of them said, "Kathleen, you have the gift of evangelism and the rest of us don't. You cannot expect us to do the same thing that you do." It was like a brick wall hit me in the face. I didn't know that I had the gift of evangelism. It took going to another country and using another language to find out.

It was easier for me to share the Gospel in other countries. I had more opportunities. In the United States, especially in the South, I would try to witness... and I got nowhere. I wanted to be a missionary because I wanted to do more. I wanted to really count for the Kingdom.

I fell in love with Romania in 1990, the first time I visited and got to meet the people, the culture and the language. So I thought "Maybe this is the place God wants me to go."

I tell people I'm a slow learner because it took over 10 1/2 years from the time God called me until I left. I feel like God used all of the things up until that time to make me as prepared as possible to be able to meet the refugees. It is professionally challenging because I'm always having to think of new ways to present things and to motivate them and encourage them.

So I'm challenged professionally, but I'm challenged spiritually. I walk into these barracks – it's a fenced area – and it's possible that I'm the only Christian. I feel like I am stepping literally into Satan's territory. It's a spiritual battle. Scripture says that we

fight not with flesh and blood but the principalities and powers of darkness in the air. I'm not always aware of it, but it's there.

I feel like every person who comes to English class is God-ordained. And even though it feels like a small thing, an English lesson can be the beginning of a brand new life for these people.

Q: How can parents and youth workers help students who are drawn to international missions?

For parents, I would say if their sons or daughters decide to go on the mission field they should praise God and support them as much as possible. I would be so proud, if I ever had children, if He chose them to serve Him in that way. Anybody who is a believer is called to serve God. That is what a Christ-follower does. If He chooses to send somebody overseas to do that, encourage them to go.

YOU CAN SERVE GOD JUST AS EFFECTIVELY AND COMPLETELY ANYWHERE, BUT IT TAKES A SPECIAL CALL TO GO OVERSEAS AND THOSE THAT CAN GO NEED ALL OF THE

SUPPORT THEY CAN GET, FINANCIALLY, SPIRITUALLY, MORALLY, PHYSICALLY.

It's still beyond me why He chose me. I'm put on a pedestal occasionally, but I'm just as sinful and weak as the next person. It's only God.



Kathleen Wintter recently moved back to her hometown of Birmingham, Ala., after serving as a teacher for 19 1/2 years in Timisoara, Romania. Wintter was most recently an ESL instructor at the Emergency Transit Center to United Nations refugees on their way to a safer home country than the one they have left behind. Through the open door of language, Wintter offered Gospel-centered hope and built relationships with those in transition from some of the most dangerous places in the world.

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