

I wasn't planning to go.

I'd made up my mind in the middle of March. My financial situation had suddenly become unsettled, and I figured the prudent thing to do would be to support the choir however I could, financially and spiritually, and send them off to Europe while I remained in Canada. "When I'm financially better off, I'll go over myself on my own time," I told myself. "It's not really a once in a lifetime opportunity."

And that mindset stuck. Even when I was blessed with a loan to cover my trip expenses, I still wasn't very excited about going. Yes, I'd never been to Europe, but I was just not up for it. Everyone who I spoke to in my family or at school was more excited than I was. I said to myself, "It's nine days away with my choir friends, and then I'll be back in Canada."

If only I'd known that those nine days would unforgettably change my life.

I'll never forget meeting Bernie, a gentleman I met the first evening we sang in Germany who caught my eye because he was dancing in the aisle of the church while strapped into his wheelchair, so moved by the music and the message.

I'll never forget Fernie, our German bus driver, who drove us up and down the German countryside, took countless photos with our cameras, got us an exclusive engagement to sing in a five-hundred-year-old cathedral, and became our biggest fan and indispensable companion.

I'll never forget standing in our Stockholm concert hall and in the public square, looking around, seeing the sea of people that made up the mass choir and realizing that one thousand people had made the trek from all over Europe just to be in that one place and sing praises to God.

I'll never forget all the friendly people Germans and Swedes teaching me words in their language ("good morning", "good evening", "thank you", "God bless you") and leading me to realize that we were together because we were all singing gospel music, a language of love.

I'll never forget the members of the children's choir we sang with chasing our bus down the street as we left, or the elderly man softly whistling one of our choruses after our last concert in Germany, or watching the congregations stand up and take part in our call-and-response choruses, or walking around and shaking hands with people at the end of each engagement, or anything about our trip to Europe. It was such a blessing to be there, to meet with people, see new things and embark on new experiences.

Most of all, I'll never forget what I learned during the trip. I grasped the idea of what it means to minister to somebody, to be the one that God uses to influence someone to come closer to Him in some way. It doesn't have to be just through singing, either. Since I've returned, I've been moved to help different people in various ways, regardless of whether they are friends or strangers, Christians or atheists. As long as I'm doing a good deed, I believe that it's part of the ministry I've been led to do. And my understanding of that came from learning to reach out to people on this tour.

I've also been inspired to reach out to other young Christians to let them know what a blessing it is to minister to other people. The feeling you get from helping someone else is indescribable, and I want those young people to experience that feeling.

Almost every night of the tour, my roommate Chris and I would recount the blessings and experiences of the day, and inevitably our conversation would end with, "And to think we almost didn't come." This really was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I'm so thankful that I was able to make it through the donations of people like yourself. These words on this page cannot express my gratefulness for the change you helped to produce in my life. May God continue to bless you for what you've done.

With love,

Ian Bramble

