BRINGING BACK CHRISTMAS

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14

All around the world children are getting ready for Christmas. There’s nothing more exciting than Christmas for children. But can you imagine a country in the world, where Christmas meant nothing—meant nothing to the adults, meant nothing to the children? Fifteen years ago that country was the country of Albania. An Albanian by the name of Leda Kumaraku is with me today in the studio. And, Leda, you engineered and produced the very first Christmas program on TV and radio in your country of Albania in 1997. But what happened in 2004, when you were really trying to think of a way to help people understand what a Christmas celebration is all about?

Leda Kumaraku: The majority of children in Albania they do not have a parent or grandparent to share the Gospel with them and to tell them about God. So we really wanted to see Christmas, when we celebrate it in Albania, with its true meaning. We wanted the true meaning of Christmas so the kids will know the true meaning of Christmas in Albania. So we began to work with the public schools.

For six weeks we train children. We teach them. We always have a choir of like 200 to 300 children, and the whole idea is that all the six weeks we intensively spend time with them. Then they perform, and the performers, they would invite parents, grandparents or their friends or teachers. This project has been going on for 12 years now. I’m very thankful to the Lord for giving us this opportunity to reach so many children.

Bonnie Sala: And, Leda, you have told us stories about children that you worked with in the course of putting this program together—kids that you were with for six weeks, day in and day out. And I can’t help but think of the beautiful 12-year-old girl, who was dressing like a boy. Her hair cut very short, so desperately trying to hide that beauty and who she was because of great pain that she had experienced in her life. Tell us her story.

Leda: Bonnie, when we have this project with the children, it’s not about just teaching them a song or the drama. We really want to invest in their lives because God gave us that period of time, the six weeks, to invest in their lives. So this little girl was being mocked by the other children and we could hear what the other children were telling her, telling us about her. So we spent some more time with her to try to find out what’s going on.

She shared with us how much pain she had in her heart because of the abuse her mother has been going through from her father, and they were getting divorced. And she was deeply hurt and she just didn’t want to have the same life as her mother. She thought that being a woman in Albania, you’re very vulnerable and everybody can do with you whatever they want. So she was just trying to protect herself. And we tried to talk with her about who she is in God, how God created her, and how precious she is. And we spent time with her to really help her understand her true beauty.

She was extremely beautiful [not just] in her face, but her inner beauty and her outside beauty. And this little girl gave her life to Jesus, and we have been in touch now with Facebook and we found out that—this was in 2006, and she was 12 years old at that time—her mother came to the States with a green card. They are living now in United States and she has graduated from a university. She is reaching Muslims in America. God’s using her mightily. She’s a beautiful woman.

Bonnie Sala: That’s an amazing story. So your program was called Bringing Christmas Back to the Map of Albania—in doing so, it seems that you’re bringing Christmas to the world. And we praise God for those stories. We praise God for the gift of Christmas that changes lives. (Resource reading: Colossians 3:16)