

Faith Against All Odds

LATVIA | September 22

Armands



The 95-year-old woman's announcement surprised the Latvian pastor, Armands.

The woman, Pauline, told him that she wanted to turn a two-story house into a Seventh-day Adventist church in Latvia's capital, Riga. Then she presented him with pre-World War II ownership papers for the building.

The year was 1991, and newly independent Latvia was preparing to restore private property rights. Latvian authorities were looking to return Soviet-seized property to people with ownership documents.

Pauline had just such papers. She had been holding onto them since 1972, when the building's original owner, Anna, had made the dying wish that her former house be turned into an Adventist church.

Armands had never attempted to reclaim property before, but he was willing to give it a try. He thought, "Why not?"

The saga started after an Adventist woman named Anna lost her property when Latvia became part of the Soviet Union in the 1940s.

She had owned a large plot of land with two houses on it. One house was two stories tall with two apartments on each floor. The other one-story house had three apartments.

Anna loved God and the Seventh-day Adventist Church with all her heart. She believed that the Soviet regime would collapse one day and that God would restore the property to her. She thought, "How could I reclaim this property that once belonged to me and pass it over to the church?"

She discussed her desire with an Adventist pastor, but he didn't see any way for her to give away something that wasn't hers.

"Sister, nothing belongs to you now," he said. "How can you give it away?"

But Anna trusted that times would change. If she didn't live long enough to reclaim the property and hand it over to the church, then she would find someone who could help. She decided to write a will in which she would leave the property to a younger friend, Pauline.

In 1963, Anna signed a will leaving the property to Pauline on the condition that Anna transfer it to the Adventist Church. She also passed over the ownership papers to Pauline. The will was signed by a lawyer and two witnesses who were church members.

In reality, it was a fantasy document because it didn't have any legal power. Under Soviet law, Anna didn't own anything. The property, like all other formerly private property, had been nationalized. There was not even a hint that anything would change. Perestroika and glasnost were far away. But the two witnesses together with Anna and the

lawyer signed the document, confirming that Anna had owned the property at one time.

Anna didn't live to see her dream come true. She died in her 80s in 1972, nearly 20 years before Latvia gained independence.

Shortly after Latvia became independent in 1991, Pauline resolved to make good on her promise to Anna. Pauline was already 95, and she presented the will and ownership papers to Pastor Armands. The two witnesses who had signed the will were still alive and praying that Anna's dream would come true.

Armands agreed to help, and Pauline signed over a power of attorney to him. He needed to unwind the situation and explain to the authorities that the property belonged to Pauline.

It was quite a long process. Complicating matters, Pauline's own children and grandchildren, who were not church members, demanded that the property be kept in the family.

But in the end, Anna's dream prevailed. Pauline received ownership of the property and handed it over to the Adventist Church. The church gratefully accepted the generous gift and began holding meetings on the property. Construction was completed on a new church building on the property in 2004, four years after Pauline died at 104.

Armands is now 76 years old and retired. He lives in an apartment on Anna's old property. He loves to tell the story about how Anna and Pauline looked at the property with eyes of faith. "The faith of these two sisters is amazing," he says. 🌍

Anna and Pauline had faith in God, and this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will provide an opportunity to teach other people about faith. Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help construct a building in Latvia's capital, Riga, that will serve as a center of influence with language classes and a health club. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

By Andrew McChesney

Story Tips

- Know that the full names of the people in this story are Armands Bērziņš, Pauline Auniņa, and Anna Terauds.
- Download photos on Facebook: bit.ly/fb-mq.
- Download Mission Posts and Fast Facts from the Trans-European Division: bit.ly/TED-2023.
- This mission story illustrates the following objectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 1, "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples," and Mission Objective No. 2, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.

Fast Facts

- Ice hockey, followed by basketball, is the most popular sport in Latvia.
- The largest river in Latvia is the Daugava and has been used by Vikings, Russians, and other Europeans for trade, war, and conquest. With a total length of 634 miles (1,020 km), it is about 590 feet (180 m) across when it enters Latvia, winds through the country for 219 miles (352 km), and increases to around 2,460 feet across (750 m) before emptying into the Baltic Sea at Riga.
- Friedrich Wilhelm Ostwald is the only Latvian to ever win a Nobel Prize. The scientist won the prize in chemistry in 1909 for his work on catalysis, chemical equilibria, and reaction velocities.