

Andy Garden's Hearts Across Rumania Trip

May 25, 2009: I am having a great time. We went into town today and walked around the old part of the city; it is very beautiful. The past few days we have been going out into the country to the various orphanages that HAR works with, and that has been great.



Yesterday we went to Dacia to the children's orphanage there. We picnicked with the kids and hung out in a field outside this tiny village. Village life in Romania is like stepping into a time machine. There are cars and other aspects of modern life around but you also see a ton of horse carts everywhere. People on farms still till the ground by hand or by horses. You see the horse carts out everywhere, on the highway, in the town, etc. Often people riding in them are dressed modernly, talking on cell phones, etc. It's odd.

The villages themselves are very "European" in how they look, kind of like fairy-tale towns, but it's obvious that many of them are very poor...many of the houses are in various states of disrepair, the road isn't paved, etc.

The city is nicer. Many of the buildings are very ugly and date from the Communist era, but the insides are nicer. People own their apartments and fix up theirs while the outside of the building kind of falls apart. Right now I'm in an office that would not look out of place in the US inside a hideous concrete Communist tenement.

The orphanages are nice. Many of them are funded by the European Union or by groups from Western Europe (we have seen work by Germans, Irish, and Dutch groups specifically, especially the Germans), and most of the facilities we have seen are surprisingly nice. That being said, there are a ton of them; it's really sad to see how many orphans there are. We have been to an infants' care center, an orphanage for kids age 3-11, an all-girls orphanage for ages 3-14, and the transition home for young people ages 18-20something. The orphanages are generally full and the kids are so friendly and needy for attention. It's really sad. Everyone is really happy to get the donations, too; they are so excited for everything.

May 28: We've unpacked everything and have distributed it all. The eyeglasses were the last thing and we took those over today. It's interesting to see how everything they were talking about works...the woman who we gave the eyeglasses to is named Azota Popeascu. She runs an organization that works to find adoption parents for orphans and also works to change child policy in Romania. It's a Roman Catholic organization, which is kind of rare here I guess (almost everyone who is religious is Romanian Orthodox). Azota is apparently very well-known in the area because she is really "in" with the media and apparently when she gets glasses in she gets the TV stations to come do a report.

The main orphanage we work with is not actually in Brasov but is the Dacia orphanage, which is the one I told you about the other day. It's about a 1.5 hr drive from here. The infants' center we work with is closer, maybe 30 min. The only thing actually in Brasov is the transition center, where I am right now. Today we scraped the room we are fixing up bare. There were about 4 or 5 layers of paint caked on in a virtual Communist-era palette -- drab brown, drab green, drab pinkish, drab yellow, drab white. It took forever and we're all tired and covered in dust but now I think we will go get something to eat.

May 30: We finished the room at the transition center today and it looks really nice. It's yellow with blue drapes; there is a desk, two beds, a standing closet, and a picture in there. The carpet is brown. Tonight we are going bowling with some teenagers from another orphanage, Codlea, that is apparently not very good; we haven't gone there on this trip but they want the older kids there to be able to go do something.

Andy