

# FRIENDS OF CHILDREN IN ROMANIA

Summer 2007

Registered Charity No. 1006753

## *Growing pains...and joys!*

I begin this newsletter with a huge plea for help to enable us to continue to look after the children.

This month the Government put up the minimum wage twice. That means we have an additional £600 per month for wages for our staff. Wages account for more than 50% of our expenditure in Romania but we cannot reduce the number: there is only 1 person on duty in each house at a time and Ion, the handyman, is indispensable.

Last year the tax we received from Giftaid contributions paid for one month's expenditure in Romania.

Please do your very best to help. And now the news.



ALI, DIANA & GEORGIANA



GEORGIANA

On 1st March spring is celebrated in Romania; the earth is brown, dead, and no blade of grass relieves the end of last year's growth but the joy of spring is alive as everyone exchanges small tokens and sometimes a flower.

The life of every season seems contained in the younger children, Diana, Georgiana, Marcel and Ali, who are alight with enthusiasm. They each have a bike which they ride at top speed, demonically hurling themselves down hills and across the yard, crashing without tears. Ali remarked with some superiority that the girls hadn't

learnt to use the brakes and substitute their feet. When his chin was sore and a carer put ointment on it he tried to deter her, saying he thought he was beginning to grow a beard. He is 5.

They get on with each other in the most happy way although Diana (5) keeps a sharp eye on the goings-on to make sure that her share of whatever is going on is an equal one.

Winter has passed Romania by, but there was a day of snow. Marcel went out and rolled in it and when asked by a carer why, he said he hoped it would make his skin whiter. Alas,



GEORGIANA & MARCEL

the prejudice against gypsies must have been made known to him at school. But it is a very happy nursery school and our children are the most lively – a huge credit to our staff and proof of the loving care they receive.

**DAN** (10) cannot cope with normal school. For the last year he has returned to the little village school to a class where the children are 2 years younger than he is. But even there, and in spite of a sympathetic and understanding teacher who has borne his endless and disruptive tantrums with patience and difficulty to the point of tears he is out of his depth and his frustration and resulting anger can no longer be contained in that class, nor in any normal school. We have taken him out of school while we await an assessment. There is a huge shortage of special schools in Romania. We are concerned.

**MARIUS** (14) is a mature, responsible boy. He is dependable and enthusiastic; football is his passion, he paints with confidence

and his pictures are always well composed. He has been offered an ancient motorbike for a very small sum by a man in the village; Ion, our invaluable handyman, is checking it.

**LUCI** (14) is sensitive and needs a lot of love. He is tall now and quite large. For him too, football is a passion; he plays in the school handball team so he has the fun of playing other teams and going to town on the bus. He reads more than the others, both in Romanian and English (Harry Potter).

**SILVIU** (13) has become an actor! He, Marius, Corina and Lidia go to a drama class run by a young male teacher who is evidently professional and has given them a

lot of confidence. Silviu's memory and his humour are outstanding – his portrayal of a bogus American doctor was convincing and hilarious.

**VASILE** (nearly 13) cannot be said to struggle with school work; rather, he allows it to drift over him, sometimes to the despair of the teachers. But they recognise his limitations and Betty has asked the Head Teacher to let him through this year's exams so that he will not have to repeat a year and will be able to go to the vocational school in 2008. He still has no identifiable interests but appears to be content when he's not fighting, sometimes ferociously.

**FLORI** (15) is the same easy, sunny girl she has always been. She works hard and, like Marius, is dependable and always helpful. She is very good at milking the cow and mucking it out (there is another calf now). For a recent Spectacular she chose a poem by George Eminescu "To My Mother" – a difficult poem which she found hard to remember and to recite, but she did it: very firmly pushing Elvis away when he tried to help.



DAN & ANDRA



MARIUS WITH ICON

**ANCUTA** (15) has moved to Poiana Serata where she and Flori share the summer house. It makes a spacious and cosy bedroom with a soba (Romanian woodburning stove), a shower and loo. She is doing very well at High School, has a series of boyfriends and is fulfilled. She is not 100% keen on milking the cow or mucking it out, but she does it and cannot delegate the chores to the boys as she did to the girls in Casa George.

### CASA GEORGE

**LIDIA** (13) writes very interesting poems which reveal a depth of thought unusual in children of her age, the probable result of the terrible experiences of her life. Betty talks to her a lot and encourages her to talk about those events; Lidia recently said "I hope my mother hears me when I talk to her." It is 3 years since she died. But she is usually a happy girl, singing often, eating enthusiastically and enjoying her friends.

**CORINA** (14) like Lidia, is not hugely keen on the housework in which they all share. She too, sings,



OUR PENSIONE

giggles (she and Lidia share a bedroom). She is very affectionate, very pretty and very romantic.

**ALINA** (14) grows taller and taller and is very slim. Her school teachers appreciate her hard work and the carers appreciate the help she willingly, eagerly, gives them. She and Andra, who has moved from Casa Dinu, are very good friends and, at their request, share a bedroom.

### HOLIDAY HOME

Come and stay in our very comfortable pension. It has 2 bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom. It's secluded, on the edge of a very traditional village and has a large garden with wonderful views of the mountains.

The meadows are crowned with wild flowers, cows are taken to pasture every morning by ancient villagers and it's great walking country.



FRONT ROW: MARIUS, SILVIU, ELVIS. BACK ROW: VASILE, FLORI, LUCI



AFTER COOKING AN ENGLISH CAKE – ANDRA, ALINA, CORINA, MARY, LIDIA

**ELVIS** (14) has moved to Casa Dinu. Understandably, he didn't like living with 5 girls – even if two of them were his sisters. However, he remains a problem. He hates school; he is arrogant and rude to the teachers, he cuts classes. The Head Teacher has, after long patience, requested that he should be removed. So far, Betty's powers of persuasion have kept him at school but there are other problems and an assessment has to be made.

**FLORINA** (16) has had some turbulent months; failing to come home one night, cutting classes, getting abysmal marks at school for her work and even worse ones for her behaviour.

But, as usual, she was the producer of a very professional spectacular. We hope to be able to help her through this difficult time. If anyone can, it will be Betty who gives endless time to the children whenever they want to talk to her; she does this with deep insight and wisdom and is much loved.

The cow now has a small yard and can walk freely into it from the barn and, setting a further precedent, the 2 week old calf has been allowed to join her. We hope that the subsequent health and well being of them may be an example to people in the village so that their cows may be brought out of the cramped, dark conditions in which, by tradition, they live from November to May.

We are incredibly lucky to have Betty, a woman of foresight, great optimism, energy and strength of spirit. She is a strong leader who has made the carers into a good team. Her most recent skill has been in teaching sex education to the boys; in Romania there has been none and the carers, reading the books I had taken out, said how much they regretted never having anything like that!

Once again, thank you, every one of you, for creating the conditions for love and security to thrive. And I hope you will not mind if I ask you to read the first paragraph of this newsletter again.

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***The result of your giving will last forever.***

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*For further information contact: **Mary Gibson, Revelshay Farm, Bettiscombe, BRIDPORT, Dorset, DT6 5NT**  
**Telephone: (01308) 868361***

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