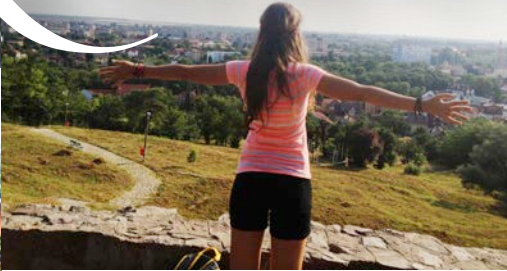


LUMOS Trip
Summer 2013

Romania



Alina-Sarai
Gal-Chis

As I look back through the daily pictures that captured my summer in Oradea, Romania, I still can't believe how quickly the time passed and that I'm back at Belmont and in the United States! Yet as I look back over my life story, I can't believe that I'm at Belmont period and living in America in the first place.

Being born a poor girl in post-communistic Romania, that state of poverty and way of life was the only thing I knew.

Being born as poor orphaned girls, literally thrown out with the trash or left on the street somewhere, being left behind and unloved was the only thing they knew.

When my family moved to the United States in 1999, I experienced a hope and bright future that I could have never imagined before.

When someone decided to show them love and take them in, they experienced hope of a future they could have never imagined before.

This could have been me.

When I moved to the United States in 1999, my life took a 180 degree turn around. Since that day, I have lived each moment with the mindset that I am undeservingly blessed and want to in return bless everyone that crosses my path of life.

When I met Corey Burba who wanted to leave behind his life of comfort, native tongue, and everything he had ever known to serve orphans in Romania, I knew there was something different about this



Me in Romania, 1998



Orphan Children, Oradea



Some of my Girls

man. He began attending our Romanian Baptist Church here in Nashville regularly in order to learn the language and get a taste of the culture, and soon thereafter moved to Romania and started Romanian Orphan Ministries (ROM). Knowing him since about 2001, I continued to hear of his work with this organization and the orphans of Oradea and did everything I could to help them from my end, including pancake breakfasts, car washes, and selling of the products the orphans made-never did I imagine that I could actually go there one day and one-on-one help these girls. Yet through LUMOS, this became a reality for me.

When I arrived in Romania, I had to pinch myself several times to make sure that this journey was a reality... and to stay awake on the long trip to what would become my home once again. The smiles that greeted me from the first day told me that there was something special about each and every one of these girls, and before long, I discovered this to be true. Before long, they were calling me *Mami* (Mom) and I took care of them as if they were my own daughters.

“Daughters?” you may ask yourself. Yes. One of the first things you should know about these girls is that although they are all over the age of 18, their life situations have affected their growth and development, both mentally and physically. Growing up as gypsies or orphans in Romania, they are looked down upon by society. Gypsies have a very bad reputation in Europe, and orphans even more so- combining these two factors gives you people that are *literally avoided* by people who pass by. Most of these girls were given up by their parents, left on the street or at the doorstep of an orphanage. Growing up on the street or in orphanages contributed to their malnourishment and their view of the world. It’s so hard for them to believe that someone genuinely loves them and wants to help them, and when they see that someone does, they oftentimes push that person away, scared to lose them as well.

These girls were amazed that I actually came to work with them, do life with them, invest in them, teach them how to go and have a future in today’s society, and most of all, love them. As their teacher in school subjects as well as life skills, I was truly more of a mentor and *mami* (mom) to them than I was a volunteer- they actually refused to classify me with the volunteers and would always correct someone who called me that- to them, I was *Mami*.

There, I taught the beginner level of all the school subjects required to be part of the Beauty from Ashes program that ROM provides, along with all levels of English. I had two girls that I taught all the subjects to, one of them that I also tutored to pass an entrance exam for high school, and I also taught English to all the others. In addition to regular “school,” I showed the girls how to cook, how to



Beauty from Ashes Center



Girls working at Center



Teaching moments



Cireasa's High School Grad



Cooking Lessons

search for a job, how to have good personal hygiene... and anything else that I could and they wanted to learn, for example, how to play the guitar. Not only did I teach them, but I also helped them in the little things. I firmly believe that in order to be a leader, one must first be a servant to the people he or she wants to lead. The girls were amazed by this. Some people come and say they want to help, yet end up on the couch, checking their phones,



Director's Wedding

and watching the clock. I operated by the policy: see a need, fill a need. I would go work alongside them and talk to them whenever I had a spare moment. I would go on walks with them on the weekends, when they were free from work or school, or make a cake and watch some movies- whatever their desire was for that day off. I wasn't there to fulfill a requirement and do the bare minimum- I actually cared.



Girl's Day Out

Through talking to them and doing life with them, all of our lives changed so much more than I could have ever imagined. I showed them how to forgive someone even after they betray you or hurt you (an experience I had to go

through with one of the girls) and in doing so, learned this lesson even better myself. I showed them how to go the extra mile when you love someone (we did all of the flower arrangements for their director's wedding to help her out) and through this, I was reminded that family is not only defined by blood. I showed them that there IS hope for them and a future (and still associated myself with them in public, even when others sidestepped and avoided us) and even got to represent them on TV- through all this, I learned that it's not about me.

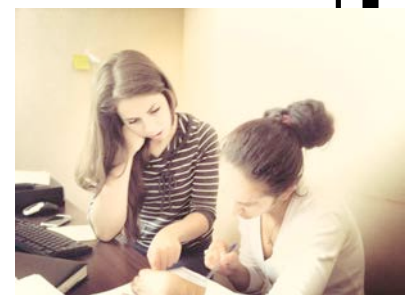


Yard Sale to Raise Money

My life is not all about me. I have been given a certain set of talents and skills- am I going to keep these for myself or let them go to waste? Or am I going to use them to serve others? When I got back to the United States, I was trying to place why I felt a certain sense of emptiness as I was hustled into the rush of getting ready for college moving into a new apartment. As I was telling a friend about my trip one day, it hit me- all of a sudden, it had become all about me again. Which, partially this is necessary, and some of it is part of our culture. It is necessary to figure out what the best fit career is for my life and what will be the color scheme for my new apartment- but that's so much about me. After going through a summer of treasuring every moment and making the most of it, knowing that my time is limited, I can't go about life the same anymore. I can't sit and waste time, or do things only for myself without serving others in the process.



Music Lessons



Teaching my Students

This trip taught me just as much as I taught those girls and changed all of us for the better- I am so grateful to LUMOS for this unmatched opportunity that they gave me.



A Couple of my Wonderful Girls