

White Cross Mission Newsletter – Autumn 2001

EXTRACTS FROM PAT ROBSON'S DIARY

Sunday 26 August 2001

11 o'clock (ish) Hungarian time. (1 hour ahead of BST)

In 10 minutes I will arrive in Budapest, courtesy of British Airways. The seat belt sign has just come on & the Captain has told us that ground temperature is 280 C. I knew it was going to be hot & I try not to travel to Romania during August because of the unbearable heat, but papers have to be signed & I have no choice. All the same, it will be a very short trip. Today is Sunday & I return on Wednesday. I have decided to try & keep a diary of this trip so that you can share the experiences with me.

I came up from Cornwall yesterday as the whole world, it seemed, was stuck on the West bound side of the Bodmin by-pass waiting to get to holiday destinations. Last night I stayed in a hotel near the airport which, very thankfully, had air conditioning as London was very hot. I finished the book I was reading & had to buy a new one at WH Smith's this morning & on the plane just now I've written the eulogy for a funeral I have to do when I get back. Now I'm feeling ready for a few days of doing something different. The wheels have just gone down & I can see Budapest through a haze below us. The River Danube snakes between the twin cities of Buda & Pest & modern tower blocks circling the older central buildings are standing in serried ranks surrounded by trees. We've just landed on a very bumpy runway

8.00pm Romanian time (2 hours ahead of BST)

Stepping out of the plane into the heat of the day was somewhat of a shock &, after checking through immigration & waiting for my luggage to appear on the carousel, I was thankful that Josif was waiting to meet me with an air conditioned car.

The car drive through Hungary was uneventful & I dozed a lot of the way. The road is very straight & the heat haze turned the way ahead into a shimmering river, edged by a lime-washed avenue of trees. The land is very flat & this year maize appears to be the favoured crop. Last year's sunflowers were obviously a commercial failure & mile upon mile of corn on the cob now stretch as far as the eye can see.

Three & a half hours later we entered Romania. The scenery changed abruptly. Tiny little Romanian style houses edged the roads with their vine covered courtyards hidden behind high walls & high metal gates. Although the road is much improved it is still necessary to avoid hay-laden horse-drawn carts & to give a family of geese the right of way across the road. Old people, dressed in black, sat on benches under heavily laden plum trees & the youngsters, dressed in fluorescent nylon shell suits & huge Adidas trainers, were doing what youngsters do the world over - just hanging around!

I arrived in really good time at the priest's house in Beznea &, after a wonderful meal of the statutory pork & chips, I was driven up the bumpy road to my house in the hills. On the way I noticed that the horses in the fields were missing &, in particular, a beautiful Lippizaner that belonged to the farm next door. I was told that Italians had come & offered everyone good money for their horses & all had sold & were using the money to buy tractors. The horses were to be killed for horsemeat. I felt sick at the thought.

Now, as I write this, Popa has returned home & I am alone. It is quiet & beautiful sitting on my garden bench with the sun going down & a pale white moon appearing in the sky overhead. The temperature in the village today, apparently, reached 32°C but up here at my house the air is clear & it feels pleasantly cool. It is so quiet & still that I can hear children playing in the village over a mile away. The birds have stopped singing & soon the stars will appear.

My house is called 'Casa de lângă stele', the house near the stars. I only manage to get here two or three times a year for a couple of days at a time. It is a house that cost me very little but has given me much. It is a place where I have nothing but bedding & a very few essentials but where I have all I need. It is the quietness that makes it so special. A few moments ago I walked through a field of wild flowers to the edge of the hillside where I can see the village church with its silver onioned cupolas in the hazy distance. The hill is covered with scabious, knapweed, sanfoil, vetches, cowslip & wild roses. It is difficult to know where to tread. I must remember more often that, despite the greed & barbarity of human beings, such places of beauty & peace exist, & when I am rushing & stressed the flowers are growing unseen on these hills & the air is clean & still & all is quiet. Now, however, it is getting dark & the book I bought at the airport this morning is waiting inside for me, so Noapte Buna - Good Night.

Monday 27 August

I woke this morning to the sound of my neighbour's dog barking. Vasile, my translator, had arrived from Baia Mare. It was 7.30 & he had left home at 4.30am. it was good to see him. He has been my assistant ever since we began the White Cross & he came to Truro on a scholarship then aged just 17. He is now married to Adina, has a lovely baby son named Vlad & is a struggling but successful businessman. The day was hot even before the sun rose above the trees. As the car bounced down the path towards the valley the heat enveloped us & our clothes became sticky & uncomfortable.

For 3 hours this morning we sat in a crowded Notary's office & when we left, the papers we needed to sign were still not finished & we were told to come back tomorrow. About 20 people at a time were waiting to do business. They waited patiently & in absolute silence. I'm never sure if its fear or resignation that reduces Romanians to such profound silence. No doubt most of them will also be told to return tomorrow & we will be waiting with the same people all over again.

We left the Notary & drove to Gheghe on the main Oradea to Cluj road for a delicious bowl of bean soup & some pear nectar at a roadside café. I

commented that the café was a lot smarter now & the priest told me that the previous owner had been declared bankrupt & new people had taken over. He then pointed to a dirty old shack next door & said that the owner had been reluctant to move away & had set up business again next door & his loyal customers continued to go to him for their coffee & pizza.

After lunch we drove through Suncuius to Bratca. It was the hottest time of the day & the air coming in through the window of the car was as hot & fierce as a hair dryer. The houses we passed were surrounded by rows of pink & red zinnias, hollyhocks & nasturtiums. There was nobody on the streets but, out in the fields, we saw people working in the hot sun. Young women in bikinis & old men in braces worked side by side scything & raking the long grass into stooks. It looked backbreaking work.

We drove on to Casa Trandafir where 6 children from the orphanages are now happily living & are being cared for by the White Cross. The children from Casa Sfântul Nicolae were also there. They had come on the train from Suncuius & had climbed the hill so that they could all work together in picking the plums. When we arrived all the mothers & the children were out in the orchard & full sacks of plums were already stacked against the trunks of the trees. The children's hands were stained purple & they were all glad to stop & join us on the veranda for an orange juice & biscuits. Livia proudly showed me the house with its new floor tiles & newly painted woodwork. She also took me outside and gave me a red rose for the people of the Roseland as a thank you for all the work they had done on behalf of the children.

Afterwards we drove the children and their plums back to Suncuius & went on to have a supper of pork & chips with the boys at Casa David at Balnaca. Gusti & Cosmin had gone back to Cadea to see their friends so all seemed very quiet & organised at the house. I hadn't realised just how noisy those two were!

It was dark when we got back to my house & I went straight to bed. I found it hard to sleep. It may have been the pork & chips but, of one thing I'm sure, I shall never again drive past my neighbour's field without seeing the ghost of that beautiful white horse.

Tuesday 28 August

Today we are having preferential treatment. Instead of sitting in a crowded office we are sitting in the courtyard of the Notary's home, shaded by vines heavy with grapes & elegantly sipping sweet, black coffee. His son is producing the documents we need on his computer. We have been here for two hours already, but who cares? It's not so hot today. Last night it rained a little & we woke this morning to a thick mist covering hills & valleys alike. A cup of English tea & fresh bread with butter & Marmite brought from home & we're ready to sit here all day if necessary. I go home tomorrow so it must be finished today.

What we are trying to do is to create a new charity & split the responsibility of the care of the homes between two local charities, each to be concerned with the houses in their separate areas. There is a lot of paperwork

required. The documents we are dealing with today have to have 7 copies sent to 7 different departments.

There are times when it is good not to understand Romanian too well! If I were able to say what I was thinking at times we would probably have lost all our friends! As it is, I have learned to become resigned to everything taking for ever & so, right now, instead of joining in the gesticulating & arguing I'm calmly sitting here writing this diary!

8.00pm

It is now evening & the documents are signed. There is still a lot to do in order to get the new charity started but they don't need me.

After the signing we went with Vasile to a glass factory. It was truly fascinating! The factory is made up of 3 garages built end to end. 160 men are employed in 3 shifts & every process is carried out in this restricted space. I watched each process in turn. One man blew molten glass into a mould to make the bowl of a wine glass, another lifted it out & a third man blew a piece of glass to make the stem & base & a fourth fused the two together. Then it was passed to the next man who took it with tongs & put it on a machine which spun the glass round & cut off any excess glass. Then the goblet was put into a kiln which was built down the middle of the shed. I walked to the other end of the kiln & watched a man carefully take out the baked glasses. Then a man took the goblet & briskly ran it over a whirling metal plate in order to grind all the edges smooth before passing it on to the 2 engravers, who deftly cut a couple of leaves & a flower on to the bowl before passing it on to a woman who was washing the finished glasses & passing them to 2 women who were wrapping & packing them into boxes. It was amazingly efficient. I'm now planning to put in an order with a Celtic design to see if we can sell them in Cornwall. They might make good Christmas presents. We'll let you know!

After this we went to a nearby restaurant for lunch. The menu looked appetising but, when we came to order, everything was 'off' except, you've guessed it, pork & chips!

This afternoon I was introduced to an English businessman who is Director of a cement works near Alesd. He was charming & helpful &, after a tour of Casa Sfintul Petru & a visit with the children, he agreed to donate some cement for our building projects at Suncuius. It was good to chatter away in English. I think he will be a good contact & a good friend to us all.

Before we left we sat down to another meal. This time it was pork & mashed potatoes. What a wonderful change!

Now at last I'm alone at my house. Vasile has driven off to go back to Baia Mare. I immediately grabbed my book & a rug & climbed the hill & sat on my favourite spot & watched the sun sink below the horizon. It's been much cooler today & everybody has been muttering darkly about the approach of winter, but I've found it a welcome relief & as I sat on the hill it was definitely cool enough to put on a jumper.

The book I bought at the airport is a new one entitled 'Father Frank' by Paul Burke. It is about a young Irish priest in London & is cleverly written & very

amusing but I found it impossible to read when I had such wonderful scenery to look at. In the end I gave up trying & just sat & looked.

Now I'm inside & it's getting dark again so I'll be able to give my book my undivided attention. It was too hot to sleep properly last night so I have high hopes of making up for lost sleep tonight. Noapte Buna!

Wednesday 29 August

My hopes were cruelly dashed! The night was silent & still but my house is under a large plum tree. Every time I began to drift into sleep I was awakened by a ripe plum dropping from the branches on to the red tiled roof! Because it wasn't a regular occurrence, every time a plum dropped it made me start & I would lie awake just waiting for the next one!

I got up at 4.00am & made a cup of tea &, because I had finished 'Father Frank' yesterday evening I started a new book. I dropped asleep at 5.00am & slept till 9.00am. Decided to have plums for breakfast!

It's a holy day today but I have forgotten to ask which saint is being venerated. The church bells were ringing when I woke & Popa has a 3 hour service ahead of him, so I shan't see him before I leave.

Miti, the housefather at Trandafir, came in the Land Rover to take me down to the village &, as we drove down, I saw for the first time the tatty old Mercedes truck that has replaced the beautiful Lippizaner. What price progress?

Josif came at 11.00am to pick me up & we are now hurtling through the Romanian countryside to the border. Josif is always disappointed that I choose to sit in the back but, if I sit in the front, I'm usually scared witless by the risks he takes & the speed he drives. In the back I can look sideways at the countryside & ignore the danger.

1.00pm

The wind was blowing off the Hungarian Plains as we reached Oradea. It's a sunny day but the wind is cool. Leaves have started to whirl off the trees lining the city streets. On the plains themselves the reeds alongside the ditches are bent double & the wild flowers are being buffeted & blown about. Perhaps they are right & this is indeed the end of summer. Still, for me, the wind is a welcome relief, reminding me of Cornwall!

There are not too many lorries on the road today & the border crossing was quite quick. I shall probably reach the airport far too early.

5.15pm

I did! Still, it gave me the chance to finish the last book & now I'm on board our British Airways flight with a draught of icy cold air filling the cabin. The hostesses are on their way with trays of airline food. It's a long time since the Marmite sandwiches & plums I had for breakfast. I'm really feeling hungry!

Half an hour later

I've just glanced at the business section of my neighbour's Telegraph & see that the forecast for BA is not good for the coming financial year.

Simultaneously my neighbour & I shared the same thought. 'it must be the appalling in-flight food that is creating the problem!' I shall have to stop at Gordano on the way home for a top-up!

Midnight (although my body clock tells me it's 2am)

I had a good drive home & arrived half an hour ago. Thank goodness there are no plum trees overhanging the Rectory! Good night & thank you for travelling with me.

Pat

CHARITY OPEN GOLF COMPETITION

Thank you to all who helped make our very first White Cross Golf Competition such a success. A wonderful day was had by players and sponsors alike. A huge Thank You To Ian Stirling who so kindly spent the day chatting to competitors and presented the prizes after supper at the 19th hole. £961.00 was raised to help support our seven family farm homes in Romania.

Thank you to Ron Watson for organising the event and to Delta Plumbing & Heating Supplies of St Austell who were our major sponsor. Thank you, too, to all the local businesses and individuals who donated such magnificent prizes. First prize of a round of golf for 3 on the Jack Niklaus course at St Mellion Golf Club donated by the club, was won by 'The Mafia'.

Truro Golf Club has already been booked for next year's competition. So all you golfers put 21 June 2002 in your diaries now.

JENNY'S BIT

If Pat thought that it was hot in Romania in August, she should have been there with me in July - it reached 40 °C in Oradea! My skin leaked permanently!

After a hectic four days with the children in the houses & a flying visit to Spital Remeti I was able to spend the week-end with Dr Monica Platon in Oradea, even managing a dip in the thermal waters at Baila Felix. As in previous summers we employed an Educator to work with the children at Spital 6 so that the continuity of their treatment & education was not interrupted.

I was also, finally, able to see that the plaque was erected on the new building at Topa de Cris and hand it over for use as a kindergarten. At last the people of Paignton, Devon can heave a sigh of relief. The Mayor of Vadu Crisului and the villagers of Topa de Cris are very grateful to all those who donated money via the Paignton Romania Appeal to enable this project to be completed.

Next week Jeff and I will be taking a maintenance crew, by road, to Remeti, Bratca & Bocicioiu Mare. They will service the boilers in the school and hospital at Remeti, the hospital at Bratca and the orphanage at Bocicioiu Mare.

We will be taking out the dental surgery and, if we have found them by then, the drills to go with it and the crew will install it on the ground floor of Casa Anoushka. There will also be living accommodation on this floor so that any dentists who wish to go out to use this surgery will not have to worry about accommodation.

We still intend to convert the first floor to a small apartment and are ever hopeful of getting more children out of the institutions.

We must say a huge thank you to the Redruth and Camborne Friends Group who throughout the year have been selling tickets for their Grand Draw. This culminated in a Coffee Morning at the Penventon Hotel last Friday when Dr Mariana Andro drew the winning ticket for the first prize of a colour television. Over £900.00 was raised.

Dr Mariana had spent two weeks here in Cornwall as a guest of the White Cross. I think she had a good rest, although we did manage to ensure that she had a very full programme. Thank you to all who came to the Bar-B-Q at St Enoder, it was her first day and I think seeing so many familiar faces made her feel at home.

I took her back to Heathrow on Friday & settled her into the Ibis Hotel as her flight was early Saturday morning. I suspect that she didn't sleep as she was afraid of missing the alarm at 5.00am!

HARVEST APPEAL

We desperately need to purchase a further 2 hectares of land at each house, in order to support the cows, at a total cost of £8000. [Can your church, school or organisation help us with this?](#) No donation too small!

This will be the focus of our fund-raising in the coming year.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

Will be available from the office from 7 November and from The White Cross Shop in Truro (personal callers only, price - £2.50) from 22 October.

Alternatively you can write to us with the following information:

Name:

Address:

Post Code:

Please send packs of Christmas Cards @ £3.20 per pack to include postage & packing.

Total enclosed £

Please make cheques payable to The White Cross Mission & send to 52 Gwel-an-nans, Probus, Cornwall TR2 4ND