

Hope Restored to a Hurting Family

Kindergarten graduation last June was a big day for Szidonia's family. Her two oldest daughters had only been enrolled in our preschool program since the previous October but had been radically transformed, and Maria was graduating. At age twenty-five Szidonia has five children and one on



Maria graduates!

the way. She gave birth to Maria when she was fifteen. Her mother had died when she was only seven and her father had not taken much interest in his family, and so Szidonia had been raised by her grandmother.

After Szidonia left to start her own family, the grandmother began to receive support through the Veritas Elderly Program. It was she who appealed to Veritas for help when Szidonia's husband moved her and the children out to a make-shift shelter on a remote pasture where he had a job taking care of cows. There they lived in isolation, with no social contacts and no educational support for the children. Meals were either bread and milk, or mamaliga, a corn-meal mush. With help from Veritas counselling staff, Szidonia and the family moved back to Sighisoara into a couple of small rooms of a relative's house. Maria, six, and Raluca, five, were then enrolled in the Veritas kindergarten.

At first, the two girls were unable to interact with others. Raluca did not speak to the teachers or to the other children. She sat in a corner with a doll, and communicated only through her sister. Maria was shy, and seemed permanently ashamed. She spoke only if addressed directly by the teachers.

It was clear these children needed us to take extraordinary measures. Each morning Ghita, our driver and maintenance man would pick the girls up on his way to work and someone else would drive or walk them home. Hannah, one of our student interns, was asked to

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Rebecca

by Adela Romanica

Rebecca Soneriu is the newest member of the Veritas staff, and a great cause for celebration. She is one of our own girls, a graduate of the Veritas Adolescent Program, which serves teenagers from socially vulnerable families, providing them with a secure and healthy context for education, personal development and relationships with peers. Thanks to this program, many teens have gained a fresh perspective for their lives.

Rebecca's parents divorced when she was five years old. For four years she and three sisters were raised by their mother alone until she remarried.



Adolescent Program staff Liviu and Rebecca

"I grew up in the shadow of my older sister. I was shy and withdrawn and I didn't like being like that," said Rebecca.

This changed when years later a younger sister invited her to the Veritas Adolescent Program. Rebecca accepted the invitation and attended regularly for three years.

"I began to realize that I received things at Veritas that I didn't get at home. I was starving for new information."

Rebecca became more sociable. Her self-confidence grew to the point that she was elected president of her high-school class.

"I was able to observe Rebecca's leadership potential during the years that she was part of the adolescent group, particularly her ability to be a positive influence on those around her," said Liviu Tudosie, Coordinator of the Adolescent Program.

"Liviu was the person who contributed most to my growth and development. He helped me understand that I can do more, that I can make something of my life," said Rebecca.

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Learning the Joy of Giving

Eight teenagers from our Adolescent Program had a new experience this summer, giving to others some of what they have received from Veritas. Led by Liviu, Rebecca and Adela, the young people spent a week in the extreme south of the country, in Liviu's home town of Turnu-Severin, which was once a Roman bridge-head on the river Danube. After a twelve hour train journey, with two changes, the enthusiastic youngsters joined with a youth group led by Liviu's brother Fané, to run a vacation Bible club for children in the mornings and conduct outreach events for youth in the evenings.



A fun, but hot, time in Turnu-Severin

The Veritas staff members had advised and coached the teenagers, but it was the young people themselves who told the stories, led the singing, and came up with ideas for games. It was about 95 degrees and the only place they had to meet with the children was an open field without shade. About thirty children came each day, excitedly joining in all the activities planned for them.

"For me this was an unforgettable experience," said Daniel, "teaching children and at the same time learning myself."

One of the most valuable aspects of the trip was the relationships developed with the young people from Turnu-Severin, who took seriously their role as hosts, helping the Sighisoara group feel at home, and joining them in their activities. Adela was struck by their passion for God, and for reaching out to others.

"I remembered what it was like when I was a new Christian, before my Christian walk became rather routine – it was so good to experience that again."

The evening outreach led to some encouraging new contacts for the local youth group. On the long journey home Lori reflected, "This trip was just a beginning. I certainly want to be involved in more mission projects in future."

Back in Sighisoara the young people had an opportunity to speak about their experiences with the Manna Church and the Nazarene Church, both of which had helped support them with money and prayer. Maria summed up everyone's feeling when she stated, "This was a chance to pass on what we had received."

Thank God for Volunteers

From the start Veritas has been blessed by the contributions of volunteers: Romanians who week by week, year after year have given of their time and skills to support our work, and foreigners who have come for shorter or longer periods of time. During the past year we had four long-term volunteers from the US who made a big impact, and we want to tell you about them.

Jay and Sheri Hartzler are from Harrisonburg, Virginia, where Jay is music teacher and choir director at Eastern Mennonite High School. Every two years Jay takes the EMHS choir on an international tour, and twice had brought them to Sighisoara, where his students have given inspiring concerts in the 13th century gothic Church on the Hill, and have enjoyed interacting with the poor Roma children served by the Nazarene community center in the village of Tigmandru.

Last year Jay decided to take a year's sabbatical from his teaching job and to come to minister to this impoverished community through music, believing that learning to sing or play a musical instrument in the context of a caring relationship has the power to lift the human spirit, bringing joy and hope. Jay and Sheri joined our team for a year starting in August 2013. Their first priority was to support church ministry, both in Tigmandru and Sighisoara, but they also made huge contributions to the work of Veritas.

At the beginning and end of their year they offered a music camp for elementary school children at the House on the Rock. They had also raised money to purchase musical instruments – an electric piano, percussion instruments and lots of guitars. During the school year Jay taught beginner guitar classes to about forty young people, and a few of the Veritas staff, while Sheri gave piano lessons to several children from our staff families.

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Thank God for Volunteers

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Jay worked with Theo Halmen, who for many years has directed our Gospel Choir, introducing new techniques and new songs. Theo's musical connections in the town allowed Jay to form a choir of experienced singers and perform an impressive selection of pieces from Handel's Messiah, which hadn't been heard live in Sighisoara for almost 40 years. What an exciting evening that was as townsfolk packed the 13th century Church on the Hill with its fantastic acoustics to listen to this powerful presentation of the life, death and resurrection of Christ!

In stark contrast, Jay also accepted the invitation of a high school principal to work with two classes of teenagers who had never sung in a choir before, and got them ready to sing at the school's annual talent show, with enthusiastic applause from their peers. These initiatives did much to enhance the reputation of Veritas in the community.

In addition to being a fantastic pianist accompanying the various choirs that Jay conducted, Sheri used her organizational skills and media know-how to help Veritas with some significant projects. She was humble enough to take on a job that nobody else wanted, introducing order and a system to the rooms at the Family Center where used clothing and other donated goods are stored. She coordinated the logistics for the filming of a promotional video, a final project for a media student from the UK, and gave leadership to a group of Veritas staff engaged in the huge task of creating a new website.

Years of administrative experience gave her helpful insights to pass on to Petra, the Veritas Director, as to how organizational structures might be improved.

Sheri and Jay spent two afternoons a week in Tigmandru, teaching Bible stories, playing games, doing crafts and singing with about 60 children. Their faithful helpers were, in the fall, **Michaela Mast**, who had just graduated from EMHS and had been in Jay's choir when it had visited Romania, and in the spring and summer **Beth Honan**, a music graduate from Roberts Wesleyan University who had first come to Romania on a short-term mission trip. Both young women felt God's call to return to Romania for a longer period of service. Michaela's warm, sunny personality allowed her to communicate God's love to the most needy children in the Veritas kindergarten, while Beth's servant heart, hard work, creativity and



Volunteers
(clockwise from top):
Jay and Sheri
Hartzler, Beth Honan,
and Michaela Mast
make a difference.
You can, too!



wisdom made her a great partner for Adela in organizing activities for high school students.

Said Adela, "Beth was such an encouragement to me. She understood the vision of what we want to do at House on the Rock. She was open to everyone and took time to understand their lives. She lived out her Christian faith in everything she did." Michaela charmed us with her singing, and Beth with her solos on the Irish harp.

Veritas wouldn't be the same without all kinds of volunteers who come and share their talents and life experience. All of them are changed by the experience, and take home a big piece of Romania in their hearts. If you are interested in volunteering for at least two months, contact us for more information at veritas@veritas.ro.

Check out our new website!
It has a totally new look and
up-to-date information:
www@veritas.ro
You can also find us on
Facebook as Veritas Sighisoara

Hope Restored

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devote time to Raluca, drawing, coloring with her, and gently encouraging her to interact with the other children. Rodica and Elena, their kindergarten teachers, marveled as the two sisters began to relax and connect with others. They were intent on helping to prepare Maria for starting school in the new "grade zero", and were delighted to see her gradually catch up with the other children in performing basic learning tasks. She has since started at her new school with confidence and a greatly improved chance of success.

Raluca clearly feels at home now at Veritas, chattering to the staff, and especially enjoying Ghita and David, who help make up for the lack of positive men in her life. Raluca now watches out for her younger brother, Alex, who has joined her this year in kindergarten.

Szidonia's life is not easy. Her growing family is barely tolerated by the other families who share a courtyard. The house has no heat and her husband's minimum-wage construction job barely meets the basic needs of the growing family. She often feels overwhelmed, but knows that Veritas is a place where she can find help for her children, support in dealing with life's challenges, and hope for the future.

YOUR SUPPORT NEEDED

Thank you for your interest and support for Veritas. This past year we have succeeded in raising local support to cover 20% of our budget, and generous gifts have been received specifically for developing our property. In order to continue to serve about 300 people a week – children, families, elderly, adults with special needs, victims of domestic violence – we covet your ongoing prayers and financial support. Please consider an end-of-year gift or regular contributions towards salaries for our twenty-four dedicated staff, and other operating costs.

Checks should be made out to Nazarene Compassionate Ministries or Missio International, with "Veritas" on the memo line, and sent to Veritas Advisory Board, 6450 Weatherfield Ct, Suite 3, Maumee, OH 43537. Sharon Strite, an award-winning painter with a heart for Veritas, has graciously offered to provide this limited edition print of a Sighisoara street (pictured at right) to anyone who donates \$500 or more during November or December, 2014.

Rebecca

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She and her sisters started to go back to church, a practice that had been interrupted when their parents divorced. Rebecca finished high school but did not pass the Bacalaureat, the exam that Romanians must take if they want to go on to college or university, so she had to look for a job. Her dream of becoming a psychologist seemed very remote. This dream had grown from the realization that all people think and express themselves differently, and that she very much enjoyed talking with people and listening to them.

In 2013 she began to work as a waitress in a pizza restaurant. This job was so demanding that she lost contact with her friends, her family, her church. While working, she studied to take the Bacalaureat again, and this time passed with flying colours.

"I had become a zombie, I had no social life," reflected Rebecca sadly. During this difficult time she continued to trust that God was preparing something else for her. In the January 2014 she was offered the opportunity to join the Veritas staff. Rebecca now works with Liviu offering teenagers a positive context in which to develop.

"It's a joy to see her grow and take on new responsibilities – she is dedicated and passionate, two qualities which are absolutely necessary when working with teenagers," commented Liviu.

"I'm at home here," said Rebecca. "This is my mission. I feel fulfilled."

In the last few months Rebecca has taken a diploma course as a social assistant. And next year Veritas will help her to go to university. She wants to study "psycho-pedagogy" a discipline that will equip her to be a guide to young people, and to provide them with the support they need to survive in the jungle of adolescence.

"Citadel Lane"
by artist
Sharon Strite

