



Dana and Brandi Bates
Viata and Kaizen Re-Creational Outreach
New Horizons Foundation in Lupeni, Romania
August 2004 Newsletter

Felicitarii (Greetings) from Lupeni Romania! Overviewed here are just some of the exciting new developments and growth with our Kaizen service learning and Viata adventure education programs—growth that is edging towards national impact! Brandi and Dana, the New Horizons Team and all its beneficiaries thank you warmly and up front for all of your support in all of its many forms.

This newsletter includes:

The Viata Adventure Education Program Completes its 5th Summer

- Viata Week 9 – HIV positive kids
- Testimonial: Timeea's reflection on her covenant commitment vis-à-vis corruption.
- Summer visitors: IMPACT, Grace Chapel, Northwestern University, and West Virginia University
- Thank you Viata 2004 sponsors!

Kaizen Service Learning Program

- Romania's 1st National Service Learning Conference
- Regional and National Expansion Strategy

Closing Thoughts:

- *Theologian Dumitru Staniloae and social capital development*

Viata Finishes its 5th summer with Flying Colors

This has been another wonderful year for the Viata program, and it is ending in a very special way as we are working with HIV positive youth infected under communism. It is a rare privilege to help these youth, many of whom are ostracized by the wider community. We express deep and hearty thanks on behalf of us, our staff, and the youth whose lives are forever changed.

Testimonial: Timeea's reflection on her covenant commitment vis-à-vis corruption.

*Written for local newspapers by Anca-Timeea Cosobea two days after her Viata week.**

I feel obligated because of the covenant I have made, to try and lay down my thoughts and pour out my soul on this paper, to try and find out if I have truly discovered myself.

But first, to those who are reading these lines, I would like to address my sincere wish: please do not think that I am writing this with an innocent naivety, as seen through a child's eyes.

I want to demonstrate that this world can be changed, that *we* can change the world. Not in a moment, not in a day, not in a year. I am confident that we can do it step by step. I had the chance to meet a group of extraordinary people who realized that the one and only chance to save our society is through education. These Viata leaders demonstrated ambition, perseverance and involvement. They are the reason why I believe that anything is possible now.

The Viata Covenant

A New Generation Makes a New Commitment

I want to participate in continuous improvement and the fight against corruption!

I commit...

- ✓ To respect people, nature and things.
- ✓ To take responsibility and not blame others for my mistakes.
- ✓ To be trustworthy.
- ✓ To follow the Golden Rule:
Do to others what you would have them do to you.
- ✓ To not be indifferent.
- ✓ To not lie in order to improve my image.
- ✓ To think before I act.
- ✓ To want constructive criticism.
- ✓ To not cheat, lie, or steal.
- ✓ To participate actively in positive change.

I have spent 5 days amongst these wonderful people in the Viata Program [*“Viata”* is Romanian for *“Life”*]. This program has been organized by the New Horizons Foundation and it has a noble purpose that can only be achieved through everyone's involvement. Therefore, I have a holy duty to fulfill, a covenant that I have to keep.

This program is based upon the concept of “experiential education” and it has succeeded to achieve something we would have never achieved as strangers: it has *UNITED* us.

Experiential education is based upon rock climbing and low and high ropes activities, upon overcoming fear. For you have fear. But when you see those who have only known you for a day or two, supporting and cheering you on, becoming your true friends....you overcome fear, enlarge your comfort zone and relate to those who are working with you.

Mutual dependency is being formed. And you start loving them back, offering them trust and the chance to look deep down inside your soul.

This organization realized solely the only way to fight against corruption lays in proper education and active citizenship. Additionally, it is sufficient for a single voice to speak the truth and many other voices will follow it. In order to assure our future, Viata realized we need to act now. And the future is us, the ones whom childhood has not left yet.

We choose life, living. But now we live in pollution, we kill nature, we kill ourselves. And we continue to say that we are choosing life; that we are choosing to live. I walked down the streets and I saw garbage. I saw residue. And I have tried to clean it up. The garbage pile was too big and I was alone....I beg for your help. If every citizen picks up a small piece of garbage and takes it to the dumpster, then I would know that someone heard my cry. And if this article received no answer, then I would write another one over and over again till someone hears me.

As for my wish, I will repeat it: please do not find naivety in my words, do not believe that I have written them with an infantile drive. I have written this for you with sincerity because I have made a covenant. I have promised that I would get involved, that I will be an active citizen and that I would never give up even if my actions repeatedly fail.

In the end, I would like to thank those who have encouraged me, those extraordinary people whom “Viata” brought into my life, who are the main reason for writing this article. I wrote this for them, I wrote this for you, I wrote this for myself as well. I wrote this hoping that it will get an answer.

Anca-Timeea Cosobea is 14 and lives in Petrosani, Romania, located in the Jiu coal-mining Valley. She is a very bright young lady who has a rare bone disease and soon will have her 3rd corrective surgery. According to the doctors, the possibility of more surgery is likely. *This letter is shared in its entirety with Timeea’s permission.



Thank you Sponsors and Visitors! You will be hearing from and getting pictures of your campers this fall! Summer visitors included IMPACT from the Santa Barbara Presbytery, Grace Chapel in New England, Northwestern University, and West Virginia University. (We are developing partnerships with the latter two.)

Kaizen Service Learning Program

As most of you know, *Kaizen* (which is not some New-Age program enjoining us to contemplate the mystery of the universe by concentrating on our navels; rather it simply means ***continuous improvement*** in Japanese) is our service learning model contextualized for Romanian youth. We designed it from the ground up to help motivate youth to meet the challenges facing them in Romania, particularly in the realm of corruption and social capital development. Because of the success and strategy of the program, our Romanian organization (New Horizons) is taking a quantum leap forward.

National Service Learning Conference

October 29-31, we are hosting Romania’s first national Service-Learning Conference in partnership with Cluj (Babes-Bolyai) University. The theme is connecting service learning with social capital development and fighting corruption. Keynote speaker is Dr. James Kielsmeier, widely regarded as the pioneer for service-learning in America, and president of The National Youth Leadership Council, www.nylc.org (and also a former Young Lifer). Included also will be various ministry officials, as well as Dr. Gabriel Badescu, a leading social capital scholar for South Eastern Europe. See www.new-horizons.ro for more details. **(If this vision excites anyone, we are still short about \$2000 for this national conference.)**

Regional and National Expansion

Through the Balkan Youth Fund, Geneva Global fund, and others such as your support, we are on the verge of opening a Kaizen club in every school in the Jiu Valley! Throughout this next year, we have secured the funding to launch up to 8 more clubs on top of the existing 3!

Nationally, we are on the cusp of a powerful breakthrough. Though we cannot disclose the sponsor yet as the contract has not been signed, we are near an expansion stage that will

launch 51 clubs throughout Romania over the next 2 years! These “social responsibility clubs” will be run through the public school system with full ministry approval, and in partnership with the Romanian Orthodox Church. We have developed a strong team of regional coordinators to facilitate this growth.

The Jiu Valley is not an easy place to live. Sometimes work here can seem, to use a local expression, like a “drop of water on a hot rock”—a Sisyphean task. And it is Sisyphean (futile) because of what is called the ecological principle: the whole effects the part and the part effects the whole—local change depends on national change, and vice versa. It has been this hope and prospect of effecting national change that has kept the fire burning in our hearts to persevere and kick against the spirit of the age and the dogs (both literal and symbolic) of corruption. It does seem that the seeds planted over the last five years are starting to blossom, and for this our hearts are encouraged.

And for those that remember our own struggle with corruption at the local level...we finally have the “sentinta finala” (the final sentence) in our court case against the Salvamont boss, George Resiga, who manipulated and schmeckered/tricked us for several years. Because of his corruption being exposed, he lost his position on the Mayor’s council, and we have recently been appointed an “executor”—bailiff—to retrieve the stolen money.

Closing Thoughts (Digging Deeper)

Many individuals have abandoned faith and the spiritual life because of religion’s seeming irrelevance to community and social issues. Nobel Prize author Andre Gide was such a one who, because of the neglect of Christianity to deal with pressing social issues, joined the Communist movement.

I consider that on account of its compromises Christianity is bankrupt. I have written, and I believe firmly, that if Christianity had really prevailed and if it had really fulfilled the teaching of Christ, there would today be no question of Communism...

Without getting into the complexities of Gide’s *temporary* embrace of Communism, it has been clarifying for us living in the Romanian context to see clearly two things. First is what Gide later himself experienced--the utter inability of Communism to produce almost anything worthwhile beyond ideological rhetoric that has no basis in reality. Claims to justice and the brotherhood and even a better standard of living were all complete shams. Secondly, and surprisingly, is the promise for dealing with these social issues that concerned Gide within Eastern Orthodox theology. Though for a Westerner it is difficult to tell through the “smells and bells” of the Eastern Liturgy (and the devastating effects of Communism on almost ALL of the leadership within these cultures), there is behind the symbolism of Orthodox theology a beautiful vision of spiritual growth in and through community development that also values the distinctive contribution of the individual. For example, the Romanian Dumitru Staniloae, widely regarded as the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20th century, writes:

True spirituality grows, with the experience of the communion of many persons, with the understanding of the many complex situations born in the life of communion. It is fed from the richness of the nature of concrete realities and from the limitless variety of relationships with more and more persons, and it shows its power by overcoming contradictions and by establishing a harmony among these relations. True spirituality is seen in the efforts of all men to achieve a common unity, but a unity which respects the specific contribution which

each individual can bring to this growth of understanding and to the content of mankind's experiences and values.

Andre Gide, who was led to revolutionary Communism less by Marx than by the ideals of the Gospels, became highly disillusioned with Communism after a visit to Moscow. Communism imposed an artificial social unity that severely undermined individual development, initiative and creativity. And there in the cradle of the true revolution he beheld social injustices as great as or greater than in "corrupt" capitalist societies. Through these experiences, Gide became less inclined to throw away the traditions of the past in a moment of revolutionary fervor. Later in his life Andre Gide gave a lecture at Oxford where he interpreted a passage from Virgil where Aeneas is fleeing from a burning Troy with his father on his back. Gide took this symbolically to mean that though many parts of Western civilization are burning and in ruin, the burden of the Judeo/Christian past which nourishes the belief in the sanctity of each and every individual life must not be abandoned. Traditions from the past that support community and respect for life must not be blithely jettisoned in a moment of revolutionary fervor.*

Post-communist cultures today are facing an onslaught of crass consumerism that erodes any and all values and unleashes a torrent of selfishness and injustice. This is already partially achieved. However, there is the other side. If the distinctive social vision of Orthodoxy (spiritual growth defined as growing in the nature and quality of social participation) can increasingly be unleashed, these cultures may yet develop in ways that can give a conscience to capitalism—and not despite their religious theology, but as an expression of it.

Two powers are at work in the world: the power of love that leads people to associate with each other, and the power of death that separates people and destroys the fellowship of love. (Eberhard Arnold)

East or West, North or South, despite how we choose to, religiously or not, label ourselves... we should continuously ask ourselves which of these two powers are at work in our lives.

**The fundamental law of human beings is interdependence.
A person is a person through other persons.
Bishop Desmond Tutu**

We, Brandi and Dana, thank you deeply for your support and Dana sends special thanks for all of the wonderful encouragement received for birthday #36!

The Viata and Kaizen Programs in Lupeni, Romania

www.new-horizons.ro * danabrandi@new-horizons.ro

Please send tax-deductible contributions payable to **Young Life x248** to: Young Life, P.O. Box 520, Colorado Springs, CO, 80901



*This section on Andre Gide was adapted from an essay by Enid Starkie in *The God that Failed*, edited by Richard H. Crossman. This work is an interesting selection of essays by prominent literary figures (Arthur Koestler, Richard Wright, Ignazio Silone, etc.) that for a time embraced the ideals of Communism and then dismayed by the reality, rejected it.