

Romanian Mission Trip Part III

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By Dr. Derek Conte

If you missed the first two installments of this series, you can go online to <https://view.publitas.com/lipsett-associates-inc/the-bright-side-july-2018/page/2-3> and view the June and July articles and photos.

When we arrived at the town of Reghin, we were told there had been a big fight among two Gypsy clans the night before. Masked police with batons came to quell the fight and one Gypsy was shot in the leg, so we approached with caution to make sure things had settled down enough to enter the enclave.

Reghin is a small, Romanian town sitting on a small mountain. In the midst of the middle-class homes sat a large, dirt corner lot with tightly-packed makeshift shelters housing 22 Gypsy families. Kids kicked around an old deflated soccer ball on the rocky yard as people sat on couches, inverted paint buckets and disjointed car seats around a 100 year-old iron wood stove outside. Two water spigots there supplied all. Outhouses were set up in alleyways. This dirt lot corner was where we performed our adjustments.

We adjusted most everyone there, including some curious Romanian neighbors. Old women and little girls bowed slightly and kissed our hands in thanks. One man embraced me strongly and said “fratello”, which in Italian means “brother”. But not all were happy about our activities. One Romanian woman drove up and asked Pastor John Fracker: “Why are you helping these people? Why are you wasting your time?”

We then went to a very nice supermarket in town (think Harry’s or Publix) and bought 22 large cured meat loaves, 22 large loaves of bread and 22 sweetbreads for the families. The cost was 397 Lei (equal to about \$100 American). All were grateful and the goods were dispensed in orderly fashion. I also purchased a new soccer ball for the kids.

It is important to understand that every story has two sides. The Gypsies are offered opportunities to join the general population and adopt its customs. Children and families are offered monetary credits if the children go to school but many families refuse because it is more profitable to send the kids out begging or working in the fields; education to some of them is less important than generating income and also threatens the cultural cohesion. Without literacy though, and with the Gypsies’ profound desire to retain their customs, there is little chance for assimilation into the community and the comforts that go with it. This is a story repeated worldwide across different races, cultures and nations throughout history.

One might think this a bleak perspective and ask, “Why give your time and effort to something with no guarantee of final success?” For me it is not about what effects my efforts can do in the abstract “tomorrow”, but what they can deliver today, in the very moment of the adjustment, when small miracles happen, like the thrill of seeing a kid walk on their own for the first time or to see a lifetime of seizures melt away in an instant.

I was asked to speak in front of the church gathering one day and I said: “You must remember that even though I give something to each and every one of you, I receive something from each and every one of you, so I am receiving more than I am giving”. That is the reward for the time, effort and expense. In my view, if I am blessed enough to do this it becomes my obligation and through this work I find my usefulness and my joy.

In next month’s final installment, we will review some memorable cases we encountered and helped.

*Dr. Derek Conte is co-founder of Chiropractic Specialists at 1154 Concord Rd. in Smyrna. For questions, call: 404-784-6008. For more articles, info, photos, go to **drderekconte.com***