

# NOROC NEWS AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2006

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Editor: Carol Schempp (You are encouraged to reproduce and distribute this newsletter.)

## From Mary's Desk by Mary Ferris, Mission Co-Worker in Tulcea, Romania

### Dying Dogs and Amazing Grace

Some people say I spoil my group of young adult disciples. Actually, it is the opposite. They spoil and pamper me. I have known most of them for 5 years now, since they were still in the children's homes in Tulcea. We have been through so much together. We now meet weekly for bible study and worship. They come faithfully no matter what the weather, blinding snow or blistering heat. They all walk, many from their jobs, and they all arrive on time. They love to sing!!! They love to pray!!! We have reached the point where we are incredibly honest with one another. Thursday worship in the "club" at Casa Noastra has become my favorite part of the week.

One Thursday evening not long ago I was very "down" and they knew imme-

diately. "Why are you so sad?" "Are you mad at us?" (So much for fooling them.) Coincidentally, we were studying the book of Acts and our lesson was about a crippled beggar who asked Peter for money. (Acts 3: 1-10) It is a common occurrence in Romania to find people begging for money or bread. Paul said, "I have no silver or gold to give you but let me tell you about Jesus." The man was healed and he jumped for joy. In fact he went all over Jerusalem jumping for joy. It reminded me of the many miracles I have had in my own life and how recently I had ceased to feel that joy. People had noticed and I was in need of a jolt. So now when some one asks me how I am I say, "Jumping for joy!" I no longer feel so helpless in my relationships with these orphans. I cannot make their lives better or less harsh,

but together we can jump for joy because in Christ we are all equal as brothers and sisters in the faith. We always have something to give, and that is the love of Jesus.

Recently the Romanian Orthodox Church observed St. Mary's Day, a day of atonement for the Orthodox. The period before St. Mary's is supposed to be one of seeking sanctification by ferreting out our hidden sins. Our worship group all decided to work on improving the little, hidden things in our lives that we think God wants us to work on. I shared with the group my awe about how kind the Romanians are to the stray animals. (Personally, I have always wished they would go away, especially at night when I cannot sleep because they bark incessantly

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## Tales from Tulcea: Sowing Seeds of Hope



Taking a break from sports activities.



Marilena gives Estera extra love and care.



Completing homework after school.

The work of our devoted instructors and teachers has sown seeds of hope in the lives of so many orphans in Tulcea. Each year more students are passing their exams and continuing on to higher education. Our sports program provides opportunities to build strong bodies and self-esteem as well as strong minds. The love and care shown by these mentors gives these young people hope for the future when before there was none. (Marilena Solca heads our Big Hearted Teachers Program.)

### Prayers of Thanksgiving and Concern:

- For the devoted instructors and teachers in NOROC's Big Hearted Teachers and Big Hearted Friends Programs.
- For the students as they begin the new school year especially our new university students.
- For the work of our NOROC staff in Tulcea: Petru & Marilena Solca, Nelu Ivanov, Eugenia Jivan, and Mary Ferris.
- For the children at the center in Babadag, who have been uprooted again and moved to new places.

## From Mary's Desk

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outside my window.) I have secretly wished to cleanse Romania of its street dogs. This same feeling of disgust for the animals is easy to extrapolate to hating certain types of people and wishing they would go away. How much better for society if they would just disappear? It is this secret feeling of disgust that I want to get rid of in my soul. Street dogs are a cultural hot button in Romania so I usually keep my mouth shut, but seeing the kids pour their love out on these animals touches me deeply. I wanted to understand the reason for this fierce protection of the stray dogs.

Psychologists say that one of the three areas to watch for in disturbed children/criminals is cruelty to animals. Conversely, people who love animals usually have a lot of love to give to others. Loving animals is psychologically helpful. The group was overjoyed by my confession so we decided to have a lesson on St. Francis of Assisi the next week. I gave this whole concept no further thought, but the word has spread like wild fire

and everywhere I go the children/youth/young adults say, "Mary we are glad you are going to be better with the animals". I had not realized my negative attitude had been so apparent! It truly is a "love me, love my dogs" culture here in Romania. I found out after my confession that even my adult small group leaders had noticed my not so kind words and attitude toward the dogs, and I thought I had been so tolerant. That should be a theological lesson about tolerance. Just tolerating something doesn't mean we love it. We are often just biding our time to get rid of it at the first opportunity. Tolerance and patience are not the same.

Now that I have expressed out loud this new attitude I feel like I have been initiated into a secret society. The youth have begun to tell me how they go out of their way to save the dirty, diseased street animals. Lidia told me that whenever the authorities would put out poison for the dogs that hung around the girl's home, she would get milk and pour it down the throats of the dying dogs until they threw up. She described with great love and glee how

she one time saved an entire pack of dogs: she lined them up, opened their mouths, and poured milk down the throats of the dying dogs. The stories continue to pour out. We have a blind dog at Casa Noastra. Everyone loves and takes care of her. Lidia explained with passion what all the other youth were feeling. "Bad people deserve what they get, but these dogs never hurt anyone. They are innocent and do not deserve to be murdered." It reminds me of Jesus' words on the cross for us, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:10) Jesus sees us with loving eyes and imparts innocence on us because he sees us as worthwhile and not as dirty and dying. I felt humbled and ashamed. I had not been prepared for such a profound lesson. When I said I would be better to animals I am not certain I meant pouring milk down dying street dogs throats to save them, but this is exactly what Jesus does for us. This truly is amazing grace! This is why I love these young people.

Peace and Love, Mary

## Tales from Tulcea: Sowing Seeds of Hope, cont'd

Recently, Mary Ferris was asked by someone if NOROC is going to start a chapel in Mahmudia, a small village in the Delta, where several children have been returned to their families of origin for "re-integration." This process has been devastating for many of these children, and many have dropped out of school and/or are living on the streets because they have not been accepted back into their home, school, or community. Yet, they are hungry to learn, as their success in the school program for students who have fallen behind has shown. They, like many, are also hungry for words of hope: words of hope that they can get a better education, words of hope that God loves and cares for them, words of hope that they are worthy of the love of someone, anyone. The seeds of hope planted by NOROC's presence have already changed the lives of

many children and young people. What an incredible witness to our mission when people are asking for worship opportunities! The witness of everyone who works with NOROC has combined to plant these seeds of hope. It is not just one person, but everyone who is working together: the NOROC staff in Tulcea, the work teams, the churches, and the individuals who support with money, presence, and prayers as an expression of their love of Jesus. In the coming months, you will be receiving more information about "Sowing Seeds of Hope" as we begin NOROC's first fundraising campaign. As our programs change and grow with the changing orphanage situation in Romania our financial needs change. We depend on the generous donations of many different organizations and individuals to sustain our programs and to continue sowing seeds of hope.



Aurora guides two of the girls in making traditional Romanian crafts.



A perfect fit...our van in the car port.

If you wish to make a tax deductible donation to NOROC, please mail it to: NOROC, INC, 200 Hedges, Abilene, TX