



Nicoleta Journeys Forth



I was born in Tulcea November 25, 1993. My 20th birthday is coming up! I was named Nicoleta Florea. Abandoned as a baby, I don't know my biological parents. My first memory is waking up alone in a huge room with many beds. The hallway was filled with children on the floor putting on their shoes. This is the first time I remember knowing I was in a Children's Home.

I was lucky to get foster parents at 4-½ years old. When my foster father was alive, things were good, but when he died, my life changed completely. November 21, 2011, 4 days before my 18th birthday, my foster mother took me by the hand to the Department for Child Protection and just left me without saying a word. Because I was still in school, they had to agree to "take me back." I felt abandoned for a second time. I would cry whenever anyone even looked at me.

Adapting to institutional life was so difficult. I thank God that NOROC was there to help me. My NOROC psychologist helped me trust myself and overcome my situation. The Bible Study group offered family and spiritual support. In my "friends" small group, my group leader is like a mother to us. I learned that I will need to work very hard. The Solcas encouraged me all through high school, and are like parents to me.

Now I am in Ovidius University studying Geography-Tourism. It's a demanding program, and the costs are high. It takes more than simply my own determination to succeed. NOROC still walks by my side, not only with financial support, but with spiritual guidance and nurture. This has made all the difference in my life. Thank you, NOROC!

It's all right. I am not upset. After all, They were just things. When you have lost your mother and father, you cannot care so much about things, can you? - Kazuo Ishiguro, „When we were orphans,,



Compute-mobile

Thanks to a generous donation from the Southern New England Presbytery, NOROC has just purchased 5 laptops and a "wheelie-bin." This means that staff can help kids learn computer skills in any setting, 5 to 10 at a time (we rotate). Software for learning, for lifeskills and jobskills development, and for fun are installed and we have lots of CDs and DVDs and other bells and whistles, too, thanks to a generous library donation.

The "Compute-Mobile" program will go into full swing in 2014, funding for staffing permitting. With funds for an internet access via WiFi, we can also help kids access online tutorials to help with their studies.

"I can!" NOROC rewards 100% attendance



Someone said 60% of success is just showing up. Yet depression, fear, disability or some other condition make it hard for some children of trauma to get to school.

NOROC's "I Can!" program tracks each child's attendance. In Romania, teachers don't call home if a child is not at school. Orphanage staff don't awaken kids who sleep in. NOROC psychologist Adriana developed a rewards program that shows we care about school.

Each week, kids with 100% attendance earn a recent photo. A monthly activity rewards those with 100% that month. Tuesday after supper, the successful come to put their new photos in their special photo album.

The next step? Working with, encouraging and motivating the kids who have few photos in their albums. They're the ones who especially need special attention!

Back to school: backpacks, notebooks, school materials, bus tickets

Special notebooks now are required for each subject in school. They are more costly than buying just any old notebook. Prices of everything are rising as Romania adjusts its economy to that of the rest of the European Union. At the same time, the budgets in the institutions have shrunk. This means that NOROC's support for school supplies and transportation to and from school is more needed (and more costly) than ever. Over the course of the year, we spend thousands to make sure kids get to their high school or middle school across town, have a backpack and geometry kit and calculator and special notebooks and arts supplies and track suit and gym shoes ---all the stuff it takes to participate in school.

Children from the institutions too often are singled out as "different," or "poor" or unteachable. NOROC wants each child to look and feel his or her best when they go to school, and to have the materials they need to keep up in class. Keeping up with the need for school supplies is a year-round activity, and requires year-round resources for replacements and new needs. Heaviest times of need, of course, are at the beginning of the Fall and Spring terms.

Welcome speech therapist Daniela to NOROC

Daniela, an experienced speech therapist, also has worked as a psychologist in the orphanage system. She now treats eight children with speech defects. This is as many as NOROC's budget can handle. The institutions house many many more and few are receiving adequate therapy.

She works with a used laptop donated by a friend in Texas. People remark that they already can understand some kids better. With more funds for speech therapy, or sponsorship of an individual child, we could reach more children whose speech holds them back. (You saw the movie "The King's Speech," right? Miracles can happen!)



A Letter from Liz : Betting the Farm Luke 2:1-4

The generosity of the poor can offer an example to all of us.

When I was a struggling graduate student in Chicago, I thought I was poor--really poor. A Bolivian family lived in the one-bedroom apartment down the hall. The young boy slept on a cot behind the dining room buffet. Two girls shared the tiny bedroom, and Mom and Dad had the sleeper sofa.

They ate simply, yet invited me to many meals. They tithed 10% off the top (before expenses) at church. They worked intermittently and very hard, sent money to family in Bolivia, spent all day Sunday at church, and laughed a lot.

In Romania, too, strangers in the street invite me to fish dinners or a glass of palinca. Institutionalized children with nothing open their hands, too. At the meal following Bible Study, each makes sure the rest get enough. No one seems to mind that the grown boys who do dock-work all day get extra bread.

Americans can be generous, too.

When I speak in USA churches, I am most moved by the elderly woman who approaches me quietly after the service, slips a \$20 bill in my pocket and whispers: "Use this for a needy child." Often she is wearing a coat that has known too many winters, or she clearly needs an updated prescription and glasses. She doesn't color her hair or get her nails done. And yet she gives in faith. She gives for the love of God and the love of neighbor.

Their giving reminds us of Luke 21 (The Message): "Just then he looked up and saw the rich people dropping offerings in the collection plate. Then he saw a poor widow put in two pennies. He said, "The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford--she gave her all!" Giving all. Betting the farm.

Jesus over and over encourages his followers to invest everything in what is most precious to them. Jonathan Hodgins says it well: "In a temple full of theologians and religious followers who hedged their bets and gave some of their wealth to God, one woman boldly went up to the collection plate and laid everything she had down on God. What everyone else assumed was a gamble, she knew was a sure thing. . . We can hedge our bets and invest ourselves in the various philosophies and attractions of this life, or we can decide that when a sure thing comes along you should bet the farm on it" (in "The Treasure," Newsletter of The Presbyterian Church of Wales).

My Bolivian friends and the giving women extravagantly bet the farm in faith. Of them, Jesus would say: "They gave by far the largest offering today."

Lives, time, talents, money--we have so many choices in this season of extravagant giving. What would Jesus say? I think he would say: "Bet the farm. Give more than you think you can afford. Give extravagantly to heal what is broken in the world."

God's promises never fail.

As the parable of the loaves and fishes teaches us, when we give, there will be enough. And sometimes it takes strangers, orphans or widows to teach us that..

Blessings to you all in this season of Giving!

Liz

Elizabeth Searles, PhD in Tulcea, Romania

partnered with NOROC

"New Opportunities for Romanian Orphaned Children"

PC(USA) Mission Co-worker and

Global Ministries (UCC and DOC) Mission Associate

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/elizabeth-searles/>





NOROC, Inc., a Christ-based 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, nurtures orphaned and abandoned children in the state institutions of Tulcea County, Romania. The Romanian word "NOROC" means "God Bless." NOROC seeks to address the root causes of poverty by serving the spiritual, developmental, social, emotional, educational, medical and relationship needs of traumatized and at-risk children and youth. A disproportionate number of institutionalized children are ethnically Roma (Gypsies), a stigmatized ethnic (and migrant) group in Europe.

Thanks to the support of congregations in many denominations, but especially the PC(USA), as well as individuals, Liz Searles serves NOROC as a mission co-worker.

Over 50 Romanians minister through "Big-Hearted" programs that offer children daily ongoing relationships: Grannies, tutors, friends, small group leaders, psychologists—all share in NOROC's healing work.

Please support this ministry of critical presence and care: Contact Carolyn White:

NOROC, Inc. 200 Hedges Rd., Abilene, TX 79605 (325) 692-2143 <NOROC9@suddenlink.net> or donate online at "noroc.org"

WINTER MEANS ...

Assembling Christmas gift boxes and bags for over 300 children and also for senior citizens, NOROC grannies, tutors and staff.

Preparing for the Christmas programs NOROC brings to the orphanages and the senior center.

Needing emergency funds for clothing, housing, and food for youth who have "aged out" of the institutions and are on the street, often without a job. Their futures are at grave risk. Human trafficking networks ply in the streets in search of the desperate. NOROC is a lifeline, a bridge, and a circle of caring protection—sometimes all that stands between them and a harsh system of exploitive labor, domestic servitude, or other types of trafficking.

Recent Joys and Thanks

You have been generous with in-kind donations. We have received much-needed items, and we thank you all !!! Some unique recent gifts include:

- Six used 4 and 6-string guitars for a guitar class (we're repairing and stringing them now for use starting in 2014);
- 250 kits assembled for use when kids go to the hospital or when they first come into the institutions (towel, socks, slippers, soap, toy, activity book, toothbrush and paste, etc.);
- stuffed animals and knitted items for Christmas giving.

This year we will be distributing gifts to over 300 children; bathing suits for summer fun; and much, much more. If we did not list what you sent, please know that we appreciate it!

We're still sorting the many boxes that have arrived. It takes time!