

# MISSION TRIP TO ROMANIA

## “In Their Own Words” A Collection of Student Essays

An important aspect of the DPCA educational experience is community service, whether that service be in our own school, down the street, or across the world. Every other year, the junior/senior classes have the chance to experience the latter with an overseas mission trip. This year, nine students, accompanied by Mr. Little and Mr. and Mrs. Ritschard, travelled to Romania for an experience that changed each of them for life. The students spent the whole school year preparing for the trip, writing letters, raising funds, and meeting regularly to pray, learn about missions and about Romania, and grow together as a team. The months of preparation yielded big rewards as the team truly became family to one another.

Part of the students' learning process after the trip included a writing assignment and creative project for Mrs. Little's English class. You will be challenged, convicted, and encouraged by the thoughts and experiences the students share in their essays. We will let their words tell the story.

*New World, New View*  
by Tanner Brassler

Our mission trip to Romania was a generally overwhelming experience. We all went through many intense emotions. For a trip that lasted little over a week, at least a year's worth of change was made. Romania had an impact on our lives, but more importantly, God shook each one of us up. I don't believe a single person came back from our trip without many new views of life. I personally came back to America with resolves and feelings that I hadn't had for years. It's fascinating how our experiences, which didn't seem earth shattering at the time, have set to work immense changes. The thing that boggles my mind is that I have no idea what influenced me. There was no specific event I can think of. I can only figure that it had something to do with the people we interacted with. Regardless, I would love to share my new perspectives on life and faith.

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Romania is a very European country. Many traces of communism are left, but it is evident that the economic atmosphere is changing. The reason I mention this is because Romania has very evident needs. There are a lot of needy people there. The sad fact is that there are

a lot of hearts that are needy. Since we primarily worked with children, this was very easy to see. During VBS in a less wealthy neighborhood, we were all broken by each child's need for attention and care. A basic human need is love, and that spreads across continents. I haven't been exposed to so much poverty since the trip to Mexico, but I was affected much deeper this time. The fact about poverty that truly affects me is that poverty extends into the heart of a person. Someone who is in poverty usually looks like it. There is a definite cavity inside the heart of someone who has little in the world and lives the hard life of poverty. Coming from America, this is such a shocking realization, especially when you are a high school student. In high school, the world seems to revolve around you, but the disappointing fact is that the world doesn't. The great reward of looking outside yourself is realizing that there is a world outside yourself. That is one of the revelations that I received. There is a big world out there that is very needy.

Although there is a definite cavity inside people, people who aren't empty are so much more noticeable. Many of the individuals we met almost literally shined out. I say "almost literally," because there wasn't a visible beam of light flashing me in the eyes, but there was something that made people stick out in their actions and speech. I was impressed with the willingness of a translator our age, Adrian, who was vocal about God. As much as I believe in God, I've been trained by my culture to find it abnormal to talk about God. Yet, Adrian was living a life like many American teenagers, but he was also very Christian. It may be that my amazement came from how he treated Christianity as a way of life. This feeling was furthered by another group of Romanian teenagers, who were involved in a youth group together. I was struck by the fact that Romanian teenagers in a youth group actually care about life. From my experiences at American youth groups, the purpose of getting together is to hold the interest of the kids while trying to spoon feed salvation to them. Those kids really don't seem to care, whereas the Romanian teenagers got together to live a different life accountable to God and each other. I would like to mention that Romanian Christians take their beliefs a lot more seriously than the typical American Christian, because there are no expectations. The Christians I met believe in a way of life and not in a weekly event. To simplify this whole paragraph, the seriousness about the gospel that I saw, really in-



spired me to take seriously all parts of life. We don't have any life to spare, and we can't afford to give any of it away to useless ventures.

These two revelations were some of the most inspiring manifestations I've ever experienced. They also could have been some of the most easily lost. Thank God, He sent many more instances and people to help solidify that in me. I think the most help I received was from my team. We grew through a lot of these experiences together to the point where we didn't want to come back. Since we grew together in these instances, we were able to hold each other to what we learned. It was like I had a support group with me. There was also one member who especially held me accountable and still does. I was able to work through a lot with this person and each of our conversations solidified who I wanted to be. If it wasn't for my team's support, I don't believe what I learned would have had as deep an impact on me.

The last thing left is where I am going from here. A Romanian youth pastor, Ovidiu, preached a fifteen minute sermon to us about vision. The first week after we got back, I had a conversation with a team member that caused me to question where my vision led and if I had one. Two weeks after we came back, we debriefed on the trip. The last topic was about our vision for the future. The last word about this trip is vision. It is irresponsible to learn as much as we did and keep it buried inside ourselves. I will promise you that we didn't come back wanting to hide what we learned within ourselves. My first impulse was to share it with everyone. I don't know what my vision is, but I know now that I don't want to live an obscure life like everyone else. I want to share with people. I want to live differently. I want to show the world that I have a purpose and they do, too. I want this excitement that's about to burst out of me now to be visible for the whole world. I don't want to hide my life. I want to live it for Jesus in every way and in every moment. That's the power of vision.

Yes, Romania did affect my life. It turned my life inside out, and I only wish I could explain how Romania has made me feel. But, since I can't, may God show it through me.

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*Mission Trip Essay*  
by *Joseette Deschambeault*

Ten days was all the time we had in Romania. Ten short days do not seem like enough time to make *that* much of a difference, do they? The thing is that it *was* long enough. Our trip changed my perception not only of other cultures and my friends, but of my future and myself, as well. In this paper, I will address how I was affected, how I saw our team was affected and a few experiences that provided some of this change.

One of the smartest things we did before our trip was having our bi-weekly meetings. In them, we got to know each other better by talking about things such as our fears, what seemed exciting to us, what we wanted everyone to do if we got upset, etc. We started growing closer not only because of all those talks, but also working together at fundraisers, projects and out-of-school meetings, as well. But even before we got in to the actual country of Romania, there was a radical change. Several people either were or began to feel sick on the first travelling day going over. Those who still felt well really stepped up and took care of the 'sickos'. For me, especially, Tanner was a huge blessing. We were next to each other for the 8-hour overseas plane ride, and he made sure that I kept taking medicine, drinking water and eating, even if it meant he had to stay up the entire flight.



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The meetings helped us and prepared us for how to better minister to each 'sicko' and get them to Romania without any major problems.

I cannot turn this paper in without mentioning our boys as a group. Their mothers should be extremely proud of the boys they raised. When we were in the airports, half the time, the girls were not allowed to carry their own suitcases or backpacks. Even if they were deathly ill, the boys would still sling our bags over their shoulders (amidst our protests for their health) and soldier on, carrying two packs. None of the girls ever walked without at least an escort of two boys throughout the entire trip. They watched out for us and treated us as they would their own sisters. If one of us was tired, ill or upset, at least one, if not all of the boys would make sure that we were okay. I was deeply grateful that they were as gentlemanly as they were, and how open they were with me. They did not feel the need to be the tough guys, but if their heart had been touched by something that day, they would admit it proudly. If they were moved close to tears over one of the children we had met earlier in the day, they were not ashamed to show the emotion. It was a blessing to see them as open and trusting as they were.

Nicole, Heidi and I had some great bonding time on our own, as well, which was something we later realized we should have done earlier in the year. As we were the only girls – besides Mrs. Ritschard – we shared a room, and having all of that time together

was great. We grew more relaxed with each other, and finally had time to just hang out and get to know each other. We got along really well -- probably better than any of us had expected. When one of us got severely homesick the first night, the other two took her back to our room, calmed her down, and talked with her about it. We perfected a morning and bedtime routine within the first two days, and one of the sweetest things that I noticed was how none of us left for breakfast, lunch or dinner until the other two were ready to go, as well. The three of us talk a lot more now, and there is more of an easy air around ever since we came back from Romania.

Friendships were not the only things that changed, though. I started looking at colleges several months before we left, and had almost narrowed down my choices to two schools – Colorado Christian University and the University of Colorado: Denver. I was struggling with whether I wanted to stay in a completely Christian environment in the next leg of my educational journey or not, and I was leaning more toward CU Denver than I was CCU. But something kept nagging me in the back of my mind about CU Denver, even if I could not quite put my finger on it.

Then, while we were in Romania, we worked with kids. And when I say kids, I mean a *whole* bunch of kids. We visited an orphanage, held a VBS in a Christian school, held a VBS in a poor neighborhood's village church, held a VBS in another church, and attended several church services featuring children. I have always had a soft spot in my heart for kids, but I never knew how large of one until we worked with them. My heart broke when I saw all the kids in the orphanages. Emanuel, the director of the school we held a VBS in and our 'manager' for the trip, told us that most of the kids' parents were still alive, but they either could not afford them, did not want them or were in too poor of housing conditions to support them. The youngest children we met were very open and trusting, but by the time we worked our way up the age groups and met the teenagers, it was plain to see how their hearts had hardened and how wary of people they had become. The kids at Emanuel's school were adorable and sweet as can be, but it was the kids at the village church who touched me the most.

For every day that we taught VBS at this little one-room village church, with its dirty floor and old wooden benches, a new experience occurred that left me in awe and wonderment and sent me scrambling for my journal as soon as we got back to our lodge. The first day, a young girl, who had only "known" me for less than ten minutes, grabbed my hand and had me teach her the motions to the song we were singing. After knowing me only twenty minutes, she asked me if she could sit on my lap during the story time. It struck me how American kids would *never* have done that. It takes a long time for American kids to warm up to teenagers or adults, but these Romanian youngsters were completely at ease with us almost as soon as we stepped into the room. By the second day, they would run up and hug us when we got out of the buses. We could not communicate with them through words, but just something as simple as coloring with them was an incredible experience. My expectations of what this new culture would be like were completely different from what I actually found in Romania.

When I got back home, I realized that I wanted to work with more kids like the ones we met at the village church. They are not shown much love, and you could tell how starved they were for it. I went home and thought about it and realized that I did not just want to go to school for writing, but I wanted to go to school to learn more about missions and working with kids like the ones we met at the village church. My goals for a career changed from "I want to write, but don't know what to write about, and I'm afraid I can't make a career out of that" to "I want to work with these kids, maybe as a teacher, and show them love, and I can write about *them*." Now, with a dual major in mind, I am leaning more towards CCU and the Christian atmosphere, guidance and people it provides.

Ten days was not long enough. We were all upset when we had to leave, and many of us expressed the desire to go back more than once. We miss Romanian food, the Romanian people, and the Romanian land. Even though we were not there for that long, everything about Romania has left its mark. It's changed so many things, and we've grown in several different ways, too. I love what happened over in Romania, how we all came back closer, and how we will all keep the memories, stories and hundreds of pictures with us for years to come. If God had my family move up here just so that I could go to Romania and figure all of this out, I think that it was more than worth it.

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*Mission Trip Essay*  
By Shawn Martin

Community—According to Webster's dictionary, this word means "a unified body of individuals." Though only five short words, this definition carries a great deal of weight. So much can be conveyed by this simple idea, and yet how often do we use the word lightly, allowing it to pass us by without truly taking in its gravity?

For the past several years, "community" has been a word used often in the Darren Patterson Christian Academy world. We have used it to describe what we wanted our student body to look like and what the body of Christ should look like, always treating it as the eventual end. However, I would be dishonest if I did not say that I have grown tired of the word. To me, it has always symbolized a farcical idea presented in order to give us some sense of purpose, almost as if it were a façade constructed by our own insecurities. We have hidden behind it, making the *idea* of community more of a focus than the actual manifestation and pursuance of its implications.



However, in the ten short days I spent in Romania, more was revealed to me about the meaning of the word “community” than ever before. In ways completely unexpected, God showed me what this word truly conveys. Since there are myriad thoughts that come to mind when recalling this trip, I will attempt to focus the following pages by loosely exploring the definition of the word in the context of Romania.

A community is unified. While this may seem like a simple idea, it is very profound at the same time. While on this trip, it was revealed to me, in so many ways, just how unified our group was as a whole. We truly were like a family, watching out for each other, looking after each other’s needs, and devoted to the well-being of each in the group. As brothers and sisters, we met challenges, we supported each other, and we managed to laugh through it all.

From the minute we began, we were unified. We traveled to Romania with a very vague idea of what we would be doing. Many were sick, all were tired, and it would have been so easy to simply give in and become selfish. However, this never happened. We remained as tightly knit as we always have been, and I feel we grew closer by the time we returned home. In short, I saw community as it truly is, all of us united and inseparable.

However, there is another aspect to this idea of unity. In the greater context, we are united with those whom we met while there. For example, though we only knew him for a few short days, Adrian soon became a large part of our community. This revealed to me that a community does not need to be only those whom you see on a daily basis. Our Christian community is one that knows no bounds, which recognizes no country, race, or language barriers. Much like Christ himself, the Christian community of brothers and sisters is one that is it to be. It was so encouraging for me to Emmanuel and all of the others into

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The second word in the definition is “body”. I love this word primarily because it conveys the idea of oneness. It unified, but in its true form, it is as one hand is in pain, the entire body suffers. When the mind is overwhelmed with happiness, the entire body becomes joyful with it. The same is true in a community. In chapel we have been exploring the idea of place sharing and what that looks like in daily life. To me, community is exactly that. It is a group in which each member shares the pains, the joys, the heartaches, and the triumphs of the others. I saw this exemplified in our own group. It was evident in each and every situation that I was surrounded by people who truly were more than just nominal friends. They truly were like the family I never had. In all of the situations we faced, whether good or bad, we supported each other.

When we began the VBS in the beginning of the week, we were all very uncertain of what to expect. Many of us had never done that sort of thing before, Heidi and I disliked children (an opinion we both changed by the end of the week), and we could not speak the language. However, in all of the challenges we faced, we came together as a group and supported one another. No one was ever abandoned to do anything alone. To me, that is such an important part of community.

The final word in the definition is “individuals”. This is my personal favorite part of the definition because I think it is so incredibly essential. What does individuality look like? There are countless stories I could recount telling of each member of our group’s individuality and the ways in which it contributed to the group. Perhaps it is Jon’s ever present heart of worship, Heidi’s oft-concealed sense of humor, or Mr. Ritschard’s incredible ability to connect with kids. Or perhaps it is Nate’s cynicism, Juan’s indelible smile, Nicole’s kind spirit, and Nathan’s (sometimes questionable) sense of style. Maybe it’s even Mrs. Ritschard’s love of teaching, Tanner’s corny and perfectly timed jokes, Josette’s ability to see past what’s on the outside, or Mr. Little’s many quirks. More than likely, however, it is all of these and so many more. God created us as individuals, completely unique of all those around us and that is for a reason. Just as we are unified, and just as we are parts of a body, we are unique and special in our contributions. Each of us brings an irreplaceable aspect to whatever community we are in. It is our individuality that shows the true nature of community more than almost anything else.

Aside from learning more about our own group and the people I have come to care for very deeply over the years, I learned a greater lesson during our time in Romania. I learned what it truly means to be in community. I learned in a very real way exactly how the overused, overemphasized word of community translates into real life. To me, that revelation will always remain invaluable.

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*Mission Trip Essay*  
*By Heidi Pollock*

The Mission trip to Romania has changed me in many different ways. It has opened my eyes to how different it can be on the opposite end of the earth compared to the little American bubble the people of the United States of America always live in, the same American bubble I have lived in for most of my life. I want to take this opportunity to explain some of the things I experienced while in Lugoj, Romania and some of the difficulties I had adapting to the culture there.

The trip to Romania really changed my perception of the things I have in life that other people around the world may not have. Before my trip, I was more into



material things and I felt like I had to have more of that stuff and have the newer things. Though I never really got what I wanted, I was content to only a certain extent with the things that I had. After heading off to this totally different world, I realized that I may not get what I want when I want it or ever get it, but living in the United States, I still have a lot of the things that people around the world may not have, like my freedom. I am free to choose what religion I want to believe in and other countries may not have that freedom.

The Romanian Revolution, in 1989, was an attempt for the people to get the freedom of their faith Christian believers fought for the freedom to teach and learn about Christianity and to open up Christian churches and spread the message to nonbelievers. After getting back from Romania, I really learned to love what I have and not complain about not having the “new thing” all of the time. Also, seeing all of the Christian churches and getting to know some of the Christian people and seeing how involved with the church those people are, it made me realize that I really am not as in touch with my Christianity as I would like to be. When I went to those churches and saw how involved the people get and how much they believe in God and everything to do with Him, I felt like I wasn’t as good about my faith as I should be. I felt like I should make this life worth living and be living for Him and not for this world. Like 1 John 2:15 says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” This passage has made me realize that my love for those material things made me not want to love the Father or be loved by the Father. But

going to Romania and seeing how the people really believe in God had made me want to believe in Him just as much and really pursue my faith in Him.

Also, going to the orphanage opened my eyes to how much I should appreciate my parents and the rest of my family. Before the trip, I was always annoyed by my mother and father and was really regretting having them as a part of my life. Going to the orphanage made me realize that I should think of myself as being lucky to have my family. Some of the children there didn’t have parents at all or know their parents at all but most of them knew their families and were forced to live in the orphanage because their families either didn’t want them or had to get work outside of the country. After getting home, I have started treating my parents better than I used to and have started appreciating them more than I did.

Before I went on the trip I didn’t really hang out with the people in my grade group. I would hang out with some of the sophomores or just be a loner, sort of. After being with this team of people for over a week I have learned to get along with them more and learned to appreciate them and really see what they were going through in life. It made them seem more real than how they appeared at school. It also gave me a chance to try and become more of a friend to them.

This trip changed how I viewed myself in many ways, too. It made me realize that I have a better life than I used to believe I had. I used to think I had a terrible life and had a terrible family and now, after going through this wonderful experience and seeing what I got to see and seeing what other people, that live in far worse situations, are going through and what they have to deal with, it has made me realize that I have wonderful friends and an amazing family and those people love me for me and I should treat them better and love them because they will always be here to help me through things and I want to be here for them too.

One of my favorite things about going to Romania was meeting all of the children and the people that translated for us. We only knew those people for a week and the children a little under a week, and yet they still got really close to us and opened up their world to us and invited us in and accepted us for who we are. That was amazing to me, to meet these people one day and in a few hours to the next day these people were practically family to us. I loved going to the village Vacation Bible School because the children were quiet at first but the next day they would run up and cling to our arms or hold our hands and be so comfortable around us, like they had known us their whole lives, though it had only been a day.

The last day of village VBS broke my heart. Here were all of these children running up and hugging and laughing and asking me questions, that even though I didn’t understand what they were saying, they were touching my heart and I was touching theirs even though they were so young that they may not remember me some day. The last day I got to hang out with tons of those children all together, they took my camera and took turns taking pictures with me and with each other and they got some amazing photos. This experience was wonderful, though it hurt to leave after finally getting to know these children and hanging out with them like I would hang out with any other child, except for the language difference. One of my favorite memories will probably be when Hoini and Ancutza, two of the older girls at the village church, took me by the hands when we were going outside and we all linked hands and they told me to spin with them. It brought back good memories from when I was a child and I used to link hands with my best friend and spin around in circles trying to go faster and faster. While spinning, I realized that even though we come from different ends of the earth and we have so many differences we really aren’t that different, we still have the same songs, just in a different language, and we still play the same children’s games

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and that showed me just how equal everybody is and how equal we are in His eyes, too.

So, that is some of what I got from the recent Mission trip to Romania. It was a wonderful experience and I'm glad I was able to go and take the message of Christ to the children of Romania, and let God work through me to teach these children about Him.

*Mission Trip Essay*  
by Nicole Pranger

How is it possible to summarize such a life-changing experience in so few words? To travel to Romania and back in ten short days was not only exhausting and emotionally draining, but it was also exhilarating, inspiring, and challenging. I learned new things about myself - some things welcome and some not so welcome - and about another culture. Some ideas that I'd never thought about before began to influence me in a really deep way. All of what I experienced can't even be summarized in an essay, but there are two main things that I learned that I feel had a great affect on me.

Romania, like many past nations in history, was under Communist rule only twenty years ago, with the people experiencing many hardships during this time. The Orthodox church was the declared state church, and all who refused to worship at an Orthodox church were considered to be involved in illegal activity. Evangelical Christians were forced to meet and worship in secret, if at all, and some were even killed for their faith in the One True God. This Communist reign was overthrown only twenty short years ago, and its affects can still be seen in Romania to day. Although many of the cities are prospering, Communist influence can still be seen in many of the small villages, many of which don't even have any running water. Although advanced technology has spread throughout modern Romania, many families have inadequate clothing. To see this strange contrast was very interesting, but this difference was even more intriguing when looking at the people themselves.



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This disunity felt in the culture was reflected back onto the people themselves - both physically and spiritually. A complexity in the souls of the people is the first thing that caught my attention. As our group visited various churches near both Lugoj and surrounding towns, I began to see something very unique in the people. The older men and women, on the outside, appeared old, worn, and serious. The people belonging to the older generation did not smile readily or seem to want to show any emotion. At first glance I saw a stand-off "ish" group of people who really didn't want to hear what we had to say or seem to be interested at all. Then we actually started worshipping and I began to see what was underneath

the hard exterior of the people around me.

I can think of one particular church where this was most evident. It was the end of a long day, we were all tired, and the church was VERY warm. Not only were we uncomfortable, but we hadn't had any dinner and it was around 7:30pm. Just when our own group was most likely to have the worst of attitudes, we got to be a part of a church with the best of attitudes. The people in this church let all their walls down as they stood to worship their God. The sobering effects of Communism were put aside as they sang to their King. The true heart of the people, unsuppressed, was poured out. You could see the joy in their faces as their gratitude for Christ just flowed from them! The service itself went on for almost three hours as the congregation continued to share whatever was on their hearts. It was so cool to see this side of the Romanians... to experience something that even Communism could never squelch.

Reflecting back on this particular church and those people specifically, it really hit me that God is so much bigger than I could ever imagine. Often I fit God into my little box of things I can understand, and that is where I see Him. I see Him as "my God." Going to these churches, I experienced God in a whole new way. He is no longer only my God, but He is also the God of Romania. He's not only working in my life, but He's working in the lives of the Romanians too! God is everywhere, and He's so much bigger than I thought.

As the trip progressed and I continued to learn about God's bigness, I also got to know someone else a little better. Emanuel Olariu and his sister Delia both invest a great amount of time in Emanuel's small Christian school in Lugoj where we did our Vacation Bible School. Throughout the week, God ended up giving me a lot of time to hang out with and get to know Delia a little bit. As I learned more about her job, I was more and more inspired by her work. She teaches English at the Christian school, volunteers at a nearby orphanage, and translates for American groups whenever needed.

Ever since I was little I have wanted to teach. I love school and I love to learn. Most recently though, I have been very interested in teaching English as a second

language. To go on the mission field, learn and speak another language, and teach people English has begun to intrigue me. God setting me up to interact with Delia was just like Him saying, "See! Look at this..." I know no other way to describe it except by saying that my personal desire has been confirmed in a small but significant way. God has given me excitement and encouragement in an area that I think He wants me to pursue. It's something I'm just getting a glimpse of and I'm very eager to find out where He ends up directing me.

There is so much about the trip that I'm still trying to process and work through, but I know that God had a purpose in me going there. I got to see a little more of Him, a little more of me, and a little more of others. Every day I pray for the people I met there. I miss the kids we met so much it makes me homesick for I place I only experienced for a little over a week, but I praise God for the time He gave me there to love and serve Him.

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*And She Smiled*  
by Nathan Ritschard

She had dark hair, and eyes as black as midnight. She was beautiful. She had a smile that changed my life. She was the most life-changing thing about my trip to Romania. Her name was Timeea, and she was five years old.

It is weird how in one single week your entire life can be turned upside down. It is strange how with one gorgeous smile, God can make you dive deeper into life than you ever have before. Odder still are the mechanisms God uses to open your eyes to an epiphany so strong, so obvious that you do not understand how you could have missed it for so long. In Romania, I met a girl named Timeea. She was part of my VBS group, and in just four days I saw the world with different eyes.

I lost my heart to this girl, this little angel. She would look at me from across the room, and she would smile at me, melting my heart. I only spent four incredible days with this girl, but it felt like I had known her for a lifetime. Then, as soon as it had begun, it was over. I boarded an airplane, and flew thousands of miles away from her. I will never see her again. But she changed me forever.

How did a five year old girl reveal pieces of life that I had never seen? How could one small human being give me eyes to see a whole new dimension to being a Christian? Well, she smiled.

When I got back from Romania, I was heartbroken because I would never see her again. I was just as confused because I did not understand why I felt this way. I was angry because I could not understand why I had made this connection to Timeea, when I would never see her again. This is when I began to understand the smile. I realized that maybe I would never see her again, but that was not what was important. What was important is what she had done for me.

She had shown me something I had never seen before. She had shown me someone's true heart. Maybe she had not shown me hers, but she had shown me mine. With a smile, she cut through layers of self-deception and delusion, delving into my innermost being. She was like my star, guiding my ship through the dark confusion of my heart and soul, into the morning light of my most elemental soul. I realized things that I had never known, healed wounds I did not know existed, and I discovered a piece of true nature.



**...I found myself marveling at the depth of the  
sacrificial love that I had never before truly grasped...**

smile, she began to shine light on the hearts of other people.

I will not claim to know the hearts of others, but I will claim that Timeea opened my eyes to look for the pure, elemental entities of other human beings. I found myself for the first time beginning to, perhaps, understand the love Christ has for His Creation. I found myself marveling at the depth of the sacrificial love that I had never before truly grasped.

The smile grew wider, and so did the epiphany. The first thing she had done for me was to show me my own heart. Then she had begun to show me other people's hearts. Then she showed me something else.

The idea of loving one another began to make sense. I do not understand it, but suddenly I was swept away by this concept, this cataclysmic idea. I started to realize

that love is greater than making people feel good, or trying to make yourself feel good by helping others. I realized that love is grander and far more awesome than the petty, cheapened feelings that I had once believed love to be. Love is more than a feeling, more than a desire, more than I can explain. Love is seeking the hearts of human beings. Love is the recognizing of a fellow human's essence and cherishing it. Love is grand and great, while being both small and intimate at the same time. Her smile showed me love.

Finally, the smile climaxed and so did the epiphany. All these revelations, all these ideas destroying my heart and mind, streaking down my face, everything culminated in one epic notion. This great notion was so ridiculously simple, and yet so new and exotic that it filled my entire being with a strange cocktail of discovery and serendipity. I should love my fellow human beings, and to do so, I should step down into their essence, their hearts, and help them cherish and fight for that ethereal being. It was a sensation that I have never experienced, for something to suddenly make so much sense. I wanted to love people, for the sake of loving their true selves. Not for any return, just because each and every soul that we call a human being is unique and precious, and worth knowing and discovering.

This idea has many facets and is very complex. I may never understand it. But because of the revelation I had, because of the epiphany that blew my preconceptions to the wind, I understand more about Christ and more about what it means to be a Christian. I think that it finally makes sense; I think that I finally understand the Golden Rule. I love others like I want to be loved. Not because I want to feel a certain way, but because every human being is unique and deserves to be valued and fought for. God sent His Son to the world to die for each and every one of those essences. That is what her smile revealed to me.

She had dark hair, and eyes as black as midnight. She was beautiful. She had a smile that changed my life. She was the most life-changing thing about my trip to Romania. Her name was Timeea, and she was five years old. She gave me a gift that I can never repay, and I will love her forever.



*A Beautiful Collision*  
by Nathan Sturgis

Romania. The name conjures many images. Literature fans might think of the infamous, fictional Count Dracula, who resided in Transylvania. Fans of the best-selling *Left Behind* series might remember the antagonist Nicolai Carpathia, a.k.a. the Antichrist. I, however, will always think of the wonderful ten days I spent there with my friends and feel a pang of longing in my chest urging me to return.

My time in Romania changed me in many ways, most of which I am still discovering day by day. I learned many things about myself, some of which were unpleasant. But mostly, I learned about another People and many things about other, non-American people in general, things which I need to remember. Specifically, I learned three things which I want to share: that people are not simply people, for us Christians, they are brothers and sisters in Christ; that a truly simple life is not worthy of disdain; and that I can be accepted by strangers.

When I left the United States, I somehow formed a barrier in my mind. I thought, that I was going to minister to the Romanian *people*. That one word, *people*, kept me safe and this mission trip somewhat impersonal. That unfortunate preconception thankfully did not last long. I shared Easter lunch with a wonderful, young Romanian pastor. He gently and (on his part, I believe) unconsciously rebuked and corrected me.

**...I was not simply serving  
random people, but brothers  
and sisters in Christ...**

I was not simply serving random people, but *brothers and sisters* in Christ. *People* is a very dividing word for me and allows me to sometimes hide behind hindering walls of mis-/preconceptions. But the term "brothers" is very personal. Not only is it personal, but, for me, it makes the people who hold that title very intimate and real. Coming to grip with this concept opened up many things and has had untold effects which still ripple across my mind. God only knows how many difficulties I have been spared by defeating- no, destroying- that notion.

I learned that the simple life shown me by my Romanian brothers is in many ways better than the hectic, "finish-this-project-to-move-on-to-a-new-one" life I often lead. The meals were simple and the fare was rarely extravagant, though they consisted of multiple courses (a fact which unpleasantly surprised some of us who had gorged ourselves on the first course). Their lives, though they had difficulties, were lived modestly. I was inspired by that. They were happy with comparative little, whereas we as Americans often cannot be satisfied with all we have.

This does not exclude the Church. In Romania, again, most of what they have is only voices singing well-known hymns. They had Church almost every day of the week, mostly consisting of evening services. They had no PowerPoint presentations; very few churches even had anything like a soundboard. But we in mainstream Evangelical or nondenominational churches cannot worship without these excesses. I had (and still have) to wonder how much of American worship is based upon entertainment? Not that having PowerPoint presentations and sound systems is a bad thing. I know that it can be a genuine form of worship, but it must be *worship*, not entertainment, to be of any value. Either way, I am not attempting to start a debate about the “proper” way to worship God.

The last, but possibly most important thing I learned in Romania was also the most profound thing. I learned to accept unconditional love from people whom I had never before met. During the Vacation Bible School (VBS) we put on for the kids, I found acceptance expressed beautifully in the grip of a small hand. Having a child want to hold my hand and be my friend almost overwhelmed me. I saw him look up at me with genuine love and joy. His gaze is imprinted indelibly on my soul. But the love I encountered was embodied in more than a single child. I found it in the translators, who were kind enough to put up with us, and who even befriended us, who befriended me. I found it in the people we met in the nightly church meetings.

I have experienced such love and acceptance outside of my family only a very few times. All of this love shown me in such vast quantity now takes my breath away. At the time, I recognized some of the love I received, but it is only now, when I can look in retrospect and reflect upon everything that happened to me, that I realize the full extent of the love I experienced. I only hope that I gave some of that same love back, or at the very least, seemed thankful.

I went to Romania to minister to the people there. I didn’t expect them to return the favor. I guess, in reality, it was no favor at all. But I am glad I went to Romania. I learned so much, about the country, and about my brothers and sisters residing there; much more than they learned about me, I imagine. Among other things, I learned that people are not just “people” but also possible brothers, that a simple, humble life does not have to be a hardship, and I learned that strangers can accept, and even, love me.

I have been to many “Teen Conferences” and other such youth ministry outings, where I have gotten a “Spiritual High”. I have been warned not to become a “mission trip junkie” who constantly goes on mission trip because they get a “Spiritual High”. This will not happen. The trip to Romania was not a “Spiritual High” in any sense. It changed my life. Romania, without my knowledge, has gotten underneath my skin, and now flows in my very blood. I can never forget this amazing encounter, when heaven, for a short time, met earth and the beautiful collision I witnessed between them.

*Spreading the Love of God*  
*By Juan Velasquez*



My trip to Romania was a great experience that God gave me to share the love of God to others and one that God used to get me out of my comfort zone; so that I may spread His word. My view of other people from different cultures completely changed. I expected to see almost nothing but poverty stricken people, but I was proved wrong. I had this mindset of expecting people to look like they did in Mexico living in harsh conditions. When I realized that there was a mall in Romania; I was really surprised. I learned not to place cultures in this “poverty bubble.” I realized that America isn’t like the perfect country and that other countries are trying to be successful like America. I learned that the culture was really relaxed and not loud and obnoxious like the average American appears to be. The culture definitely changed my thoughts of how I thought they were going to act and be during their every day life styles. Every person that I met was always very happy and outgoing. They seemed to be very thankful for just life in general. I didn’t expect the Romanian culture to speak English but a lot of them spoke it very well. I went into the culture with a very limited knowledge of their language. I realized that English is spoken a lot in Romania.

The trip affected my perception of my team very greatly. I don’t see much of my friends since I live in a different town but God showed me that they are servants of His. I expected to see our team split up in our little cliques but instead we stayed unified in everything we did. I was expecting to be singled-out on a lot of things but our team stayed as a unit; we remained strong acting as one team. I saw our team encourage others a lot. What really stayed with me even today was the fact that many of our team members got sick either on the trip or slightly before the trip and never thought only of themselves. They didn’t lie in bed all day or not try to help out with Vacation Bible School things. They persevered and that really showed me how strong they are.

The trip, most importantly, showed me a lot about myself. Ever since I accepted Christ into my heart this year, he has been showing me tons of new things. He has opened my eyes and blessed me incredibly. I was discussing with a teacher during the trip that if I had been be on a mission trip like this one two years ago, I wouldn’t have

been affected by it at all. In this trip, God showed me how amazing his love is. He showed me that his love and word can spread all the way to the other side of the world. He showed me that I was not on that trip just to enjoy a trip with my classmates, but that I had a purpose being there and that He was using me to carry out the plan that He has for me. Even though I am a fairly recent born-again Christian, He revealed to me that I can do all things through him.

I had no idea what a mission trip would look like before this trip. It changed my very “generic” view of what I thought missions were supposed to be like. I thought short term missions were supposed to be how Americans go overseas and see how many people they can convert to Christianity. It seemed to me like we were supposed to strictly have a Vacation Bible School and convert people in their churches to Christianity. I pictured us being like the stereotypical Christians going there to earn rewards in heaven. Once again, this trip completely changed my mindset of this as well. Some of our plans didn’t go through but we remained “moldable” and went with what plan lay ahead of us. We took this trip to be a blessing to the people. We created great relationships with the people of Romania. This has been going along with what God has been trying to teach me for a long time now. He has been teaching me how to Place Share with other people and enter into their suffering. God took it to a whole other level for me and taught me how to place share with people of a different culture and a whole different country. Some of the younger kids barely get touched or hugged. We spoke with the children and played games with them. The best part of being with the kids was that we hugged them and absolutely loved it. After the first day at a Vacation Bible School that we did in a poorer neighborhood, the kids were absolutely ecstatic to see us the next day. They were literally waiting at the church for us and that was amazing. One child who was about 4 years old really became attached to me and me to him. His name was Fabian and after the first day of being with him, the next day he came up to me and held my hand and wanted me to sit by him. He didn’t let go of my hand for the rest of the day. He wrote me a letter too. Me being able to hold the kids and just play with them and show them that God cares for them was just a completely awesome experience for me.

...God showed me how amazing his love is...  
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After this trip, the plans for my future changed. I actually would not mind one bit going to the same place or even a different place and share the love of God again. I learned that mission trips are nothing to be afraid of. I am not afraid to share my experiences with God to a whole different culture. After I had the opportunity to share my testimony in a few church services, I actually enjoyed sharing it a lot after that. I learned that God is calling many of us to come out into the mission field and we as Christians should not fear that at all. God is always with us and He will never abandon us. He has a plan for us all.

A single profound moment that touched me was the little boy mentioned earlier in this essay who gave me the note. He was very cute and he was very attached to me. I really enjoyed being a blessing to him. I held him and gave him “piggy-back rides.” I was glad that I touched his life and was blessed with the opportunity to share the word of God with him. I pray for him every night. He looked up to me as a big brother it seemed like. I did not want to say good-bye to him, but I trust that he is under God’s care and I will see him one day in heaven.

An overall trait that God is showing me this whole year is the word “blessed.” God blessed me a lot just by giving me the chance to go on this trip. He has blessed me with the opportunity to go to a college!!! A Christian one nonetheless!! I thank God every night that He has given me everything I could possibly ask for. Through difficulties, such as jet lag or being extremely tired, God has blessed me with a smile to pull through it and a constant reminder of how blessed I am. When I got my tattoo, I had no idea where the idea came from for me to get the word “Blessed” on the cross, but now I know that it was God speaking to me. I have a reminder that God has blessed me in countless ways. He has blessed me with the gift of encouragement and a smile to let others know that He has blessed us all. Overall, God used me on this trip to be a blessing to the people He loves and He has blessed me with the ability to do that. Everyday I take for granted all the things and friends and opportunities I have received, but I get reminded that it’s all thanks to God. He has given me an amazing trip that will stay in my heart forever.