



# CASA MEA NEWS

Spring 2006 Greetings from Jan and Julia:

## Celebrating Our Accomplishments and Looking Ahead



### Celebrating the Joy of Julia

Casa Mea's first child, Julia, celebrated her second birthday on January 12th, from 2 pm until bedtime! Her friends popped in and out to share her birthday cake, made by her babysitter, Nuti, and to wish her a happy birthday. The belle of the ball played "catch me if you can" (currently her favorite game) and enjoyed the wrapping paper

and boxes as much, if not more, than her gifts. She's a typical two-year-old, and truly a delight!

Julia has been living at Casa Mea since June 4, 2004. When she arrived at nearly five months old, she weighed only 10 pounds and was severely anemic. With the love and attention she has received at Casa Mea, Julia has grown to be a flourishing 25-lb. toddler and has captured the hearts of Casa Mea's many patrons and volunteers. We continue to anticipate the day when hers is just the first Casa Mea success story as we pursue our vision of providing a loving home for 10 to 12 of Romania's abandoned children.

### Celebrating our New Car!

After three years of "hoofing it" or relying on Romania's public transportation, we are now able to meet our transportation needs with the 2002 Ford Focus hatchback that Casa Mea was able to acquire thanks to your continuing support.

Casa Mea is situated on 1.25 acres in Prejmer, just northeast of Brasov – one of the largest cities in Romania, about 100 miles north of its capital, Bucharest. *"When we first began taking public transportation from Brasov to Prejmer, the 14-seat minivan left whenever it was full. At the time we were astounded. It could take several hours to go 15 kilometers because of waiting in the minivan... Once it was full, off we would go,"* says Jan.

*"But we just didn't know how lucky we were at the time. A year ago, the system changed and it now goes on schedule every half hour ... at any given time it may be empty or full-to-overflowing."*

*"Imagine me hopping on the van with Julia, our shopping, and her stroller. A tight squeeze in the best of times! But the last time we took the minivan, there were eight people squeezed in like sardines, just between the front windshield and the first seat!"*

*"Now with our little car, we can travel in comfort, and come and go when we need to – or want to!"*  
**Thank you, thank you, thank you!**



## Celebrating Accomplishments and Volunteers

Thanks to the generous efforts of volunteer teams and your donations, Casa Mea has made great progress toward realizing our vision for the 4,000



square foot three-generation farmhouse we purchased in the fall of 2003. When it's finished, it will have 10 large rooms, several bedrooms and bathrooms for the children, an office, laundry room, bunk house for short-term volunteers and a small apartment for long-term volunteers. The property also has a large barn that will become an indoor sports arena/play area for the older children, a huge vegetable garden, fruit trees, and a small grape arbor.

Since it was initially purchased, the oldest section of the house has been entirely replaced, and many upgrades have made it into the beginnings of the group home we envision. Work to date has included:

- Lots of demolition! – a work team in 2004 spent a week removing old electrical wires, plaster, old paint, old brick floors, and walls.
- The dirt floors on the ground level have been replaced with concrete.
- The chicken shed, cow and pig stalls have been removed to create space for a future laundry room and a bunkhouse, with a small apartment above for off-duty staff.
- The foundation has been reinforced.
- Central heating has replaced wood-burning stoves.
- Thermal insulated windows and doors have been installed on the first level.
- New water pipes and electrical wires were installed.
- Two sections of the roof have been replaced.
- The old open septic lines were replaced with a closed system.
- Furniture, bedding, towels, dishes, pots and pans have been purchased.
- A work team of five men from Northern Ireland worked from sunup to sundown for a little over a week to totally renovate the kitchen, including provision of all the materials and appliances.



- A work team from England worked for a solid week to complete the dining room, coat room, and bathroom – again, providing the materials and supplies with money they raised in England before coming to Prejmer.
- The gardens have been rejuvenated to cultivate a supply of fresh garden vegetables, in addition to the apple, pear and plum trees on the site.

**WOW! Again – thank you, thank you, thank you. Without your donations and the volunteer groups' efforts we could not have come so far.**



Work teams are groups of volunteers who come to Prejmer for a week or two of their holiday/vacation time to complete a specific renovation project on the house. Teams have included both skilled and unskilled workers, and some volunteers in support roles such as the group's cook. These teams have been absolutely invaluable to Casa Mea! To help with their travel costs, Casa Mea hopes to be able to provide free accommodations in its bunk house for future work teams who want to stay on site during their projects.

Work teams have ranged from informal groups of friends to employer and church groups that have adopted Casa Mea as a special charity. All donations of both time and money are tax-deductible (although we recommend checking with your tax advisor on the details). To form a work team of your own to help with these renovations, please contact us at [jan@casamea.org](mailto:jan@casamea.org). There are many exciting projects planned for 2006 and we would love to provide you with this rewarding experience!



## Volunteer's View

By Damian Galvin

*"I first went to Romania to help build a kitchen in 2003, in a baby orphanage in Romania and much to my surprise, I became hooked. I now spend most of my annual holidays there. You cannot help but be affected by what you see. Anyone with a heart will want to make a small difference.*

*"Casa Mea is a start-up orphanage project that Jan Calos has admirably stuck to for the past few years. The disused farmhouse has come a long way. I first went there for a preliminary planning trip in April of 2005 as a precursor to returning in September with seven friends and four hired local men to contribute a week's work. When I first saw the house, it was almost a bare brick shell with a few windows. When returning in September, all doors and windows were fitted, complete rewiring done, walls plastered, lighting fitted, and kitchen and plumbing fitted. There was a real sense of feasibility. The team I organized, in recognition of their unyielding efforts, did a fantastic job. We were able to fit a bathroom and shower, tile and decorate a large lounge, build concrete steps, and finish tiling in the kitchen hallways. We left unused funds behind to have internal doors fitted. I was pleased to see in December, on returning, that all that was in place.*

*"I am hoping to return in April, with another smaller team, to continue the good work. Anyone wishing to join us can be assured of a week of good fun, much entertainment and, of course, a rewarding experience. Just drop me an email to me at [damo33@lycos.com](mailto:damo33@lycos.com)."*

## What's On Deck?

Casa Mea has some ambitious plans for 2006, and with your help we hope to be celebrating applications for accreditation by July, licensing by September, and the request for additional children to welcome to Casa Mea by November. **We have come so far, and have much to be grateful for already – but we need your help to make these dreams come "all-the-way-true" for more of Romania's waiting children!**

**Our needs for materials and labor in the coming year include:**

- Replace the roof on the house's main section – need \$22,000
- Add gutters to the main sections of the house – need \$2,000

- Complete the laundry room, office, and bunk house – need \$6,200 and a work team, will make a great project!
- Replaster the new sections of the house – need \$1,000
- Rewire the bunkhouse – need \$2,500
- Paint the walls and install new floors and ceilings in two bedrooms and two play areas on the second level – need \$1,500 and a work team
- Add four bathrooms on the second level – need \$1,400 and a work team



- Create an outdoor play area in the courtyard (site prep work and construction of a play station) – need \$5,000 for materials and a work team ... **how much fun will THIS project be??!!**
- Install doors and windows on the garage – need \$2,500
- Add thermopane windows and doors – need \$4,500
- Re-cement the store room – need \$5,000

The roof, gutters, replastering, laundry room, office, and bunk house will complete the main level of "our home" – and yes, you should think of it as your home, too, as it would not be possible without you!

Given Romania's long and bitterly cold winters (which made news in the U.S. this year), the play area will provide an inviting place for children to grab some Vitamin D from the summer sun and for climbing, tumbling, peals of laughter (and dirty laundry!) – things every child should get to experience.

And when the second level is finished, we will have both the overall environment, and the private spaces, to qualify to welcome more children to Casa Mea. **We cannot tell you how excited we are to see that this goal is truly not so very far away!**



## Celebrating Beatlemania – & Casa Mea!

A show featuring the Beatlemania Now music group was presented by Casa Mea on October 1, 2005. The show was put together by Kevin Calos, Casa Mea's former president, who with his generous spirit found the perfect venue, the Auditorium Theatre in Rochester, NY. We had a turnout of roughly 200, whom we celebrate for generating more than \$3,100 for us that night!

### You Can Help.

People often don't donate to a cause like Casa Mea because they can't afford a "significant" donation. But literally, anything you can send us will make a difference here in Romania. We have come so far on so relatively little – averaging \$34,750 in annual donations for the last three years, bringing our investment in Casa Mea so far to a little more than \$104,000. (That does not include any of the proceeds of my U.S. life that enabled me to begin this amazing journey.)

Our goals for 2006 are ambitious, we know. But if we can achieve the goals on that list, we can give more kids bedtime stories and good-night hugs and birthday cakes with candles and presents complete with wrapping paper and boxes. **It's not about the house, it's about other children joining Julia at Casa Mea – "My Home" in Romanian.**



### To get there, we need your financial assistance and your ambassadorship.

We have about 600 people on our mailing list so far – thank you, each of you, for your past interest and support! If everyone reading this sent us just \$90, we'd meet our goal. Some can send more, some less. Perhaps some will ask your employer to sponsor a fundraiser and to match employee donations. Or ask your church or school to "adopt" Casa Mea, and then plan some fundraising activities – or a work trip! Some of you might share copies of this newsletter with your friends, family, coworkers, church congregations, and neighbors – celebrating what you have helped us accomplish so far. Or, some will find serendipitous inspiration, as Kevin did when he thought to put Beatlemania, the Auditorium Theatre, and Casa Mea together.

We are grateful to you already, and hope you can help us finish what you have helped us begin. If you are keeping Casa Mea and now-two-year-old Julia in your thoughts, we celebrate you. If you can actively help us move forward toward this dream, we celebrate you. If you can simply help us spread the word to your friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, schools and churches, we celebrate you.

### We Celebrate You!

All we want to do is help make the world a little better for a few kids in a place where so many of them do not have that chance. **Whatever you can do, will help. Thank you, thank you, thank you.**





# CASA MEA NEWS

Summer 2006 Greetings from Jan and Julia:

## Good Things are Happening at Casa Mea!



### Kitten and Kaboodle

While Jan was doing what she could for the Casa Mea kitty on a fundraising trip in the U.S. (see story below), Julia was pursuing a whole different kind of kitty – her new friend, Smokey, who has come to live at Prejmer. Julia is slowly learning to be gentle with the baby kitty but has yet to grasp the concept of “gentle.” Luckily, Smokey seems to enjoy all the attention Julia gives her, rough or gentle!

### A Successful Fundraising Trip

A few weeks ago, Jan Calos returned to the states for a much needed vacation and to raise more money for Casa Mea.

The night before she arrived, ABC's program “Nightline” aired a segment on the current condition of some of Romania's abandoned and institutionalized children. Its conclusion was that “...*thousands of children in government-run institutions are still living in conditions that are little changed from a decade ago...*” This thought-provoking segment can be seen on <http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=1944838>. **(Make time for it – it's 5:24 minutes and brings the reward of helping Casa Mea into sharper focus.)**

A corresponding article appeared in the May 10th edition of The New York Times (NYTimes.com). Their preview reads “*Children tied to cribs and chairs, often cold, underfed and smeared with their own feces: Romania has tried over the last decade to erase those images of its orphanages seen around the world.*” (Full archives were unavailable at press time). This kind of media exposure helps reinforce the very real difference that Casa Mea can make.

While in the states, Jan was invited to give a presentation on Casa Mea to a group of friends and relatives of Board Director Toni Malanaphy-Sorg. It was a fun evening on a condominium rooftop in downtown St. Paul, Minnesota, which gave everyone a grand view of the city as well as the sunset. Casa Mea made many new generous and supportive friends (and welcomes you to our family)!



Later in the trip, while in Los Olivos, California, Jan was hosted by the Los Olivos Rotary Club – who rolled out the red carpet for her and served a delicious pot luck dinner

for the occasion. (Such fun to enjoy others' home cooking!) Jan enjoyed meeting new people and also reconnecting with members of the Club who visited Casa Mea in Prejmer last summer. (Jan is hoping that they will return to Prejmer again soon.) While in Los Olivos, Sylvia and Al Remmenga hosted her and were most gracious in opening their hearts and home to her.

## We Couldn't Do It Without You!

Volunteers continue to be an integral part of Casa Mea and are greatly appreciated. This year Susan Maccoy was with us from northern England for several months and helped by tackling assorted "to-do's" around Casa Mea and babysitting Julia. Bridget Wickert, who hails from the Chicago area, spent a month with us and not only babysat but created a DVD of Casa Mea's story. Both women are returning in July for a year or two! We cannot believe our good fortune to have them with us again.

Damian Galvan, also from England, returned with another group of hardworking and enthusiastic volunteers. Part of his group helped renovate the bunkhouse while the other half completed Casa Mea's office. Even when Damian is back in England, he continues to raise funds for Casa Mea. As a result, Casa Mea is now able to hire one full-time staff member.

## Volunteer's View



By Susan Maccoy

*"I am a 27 year old Veterinary Nurse from the north of England. I first came to Romania in April 2004 with Teaching and Projects Abroad, to volunteer in an*

*orphanage in Brasov. My first visit to Casa Mea's house in Prejmer was in May 2004 after I spotted a note, posted by Jan, asking for help with renovations. I asked other TAPA volunteers if they would be interested in a trip to Prejmer and off we went – about 15 of us – to see what we could do. Over the next two months I visited Prejmer once or twice a week to help with digging out the rooms under the main house, weeding, knocking down walls, painting, etc. When I returned home I kept in contact with Jan and continued to fund raise for Casa Mea. Earlier this year I returned to Romania and was amazed when I saw how good those dingy little rooms that I left two years ago, look now. I am now in the fourth month of my stay and after a brief trip home next month, I will be staying in Romania for the foreseeable future. Having worked in the Children's Hospital, group homes and orphanages I have witnessed firsthand how much these children desperately need our help. I will continue to support Jan as much as I can in her work here so that as soon as possible Casa Mea can help more children in the way it has already helped Julia."*



## The Rewards of Hard Work

We are so fortunate that Bryan Parr discovered Casa Mea! Bryan is a 73-year old retired builder from England. For the past eleven years he has volunteered his time and expertise to building Romania's first home for about 34 visually impaired children. The home opened this past Easter and Bryan was in search of a new project to work on when he discovered Casa Mea.

Bryan and his wife Sylvia arrived in Prejmer on April 9. After driving all the way from England in a car loaded with donations, tools, and supplies, he immediately set to work at Casa Mea. He would start each day at 7:00 a.m. and not stop until 6:00 p.m. – and this was Monday through Saturday. Bryan kept up this pace for the entire three weeks he was here! His rigorous schedule put us younger ones to shame; we could barely keep up with him.

Bryan also became Julia's heart throb and the two of them could be seen walking down the street or around the property chatting away. Casa Mea offered Bryan a full-time position, but he could not accept ... "too much work to do back in England." (And he is retired!) However, he did leave his tools and work clothes and promised he would return. We can hardly wait to have him and his delightful wife back with us.

## The Bunkhouse is Nearly Ready...

**... and we'd love to welcome you to Casa Mea in person!** There are many more volunteer projects planned for 2006 and we would love to provide you with this rewarding experience! Please contact us at [jan@casamea.org](mailto:jan@casamea.org).



## There She Goes ...



Construction continues at Casa Mea. This spring workers started on the last section of the new roof and promised to have it completed by the end of June. By the time you read this, it should be done. Hurrah!!

## ... and Here She Comes!



Completion of the roof will be a major accomplishment for Casa Mea because then the outside structure of the house will be finished. With the exception of painting the outside (*any volunteers!? Think summer vacation to ... Romania!*), all the remaining work to the house will be inside. This means there will be no work stoppages due to rain, sleet, or snow! The hour is upon us ... all we need is you! Contact us at [jan@casamea.org](mailto:jan@casamea.org) to see what you could sponsor and participate in.

## You Can Help.

Remember, the average salary in Romania is less than many U.S. families' monthly mortgage payments -- \$1,440. A Year! The populace remains deeply steeped in a decades-old culture that viewed children as a community asset (i.e. government property). A system of values undermining the family and promoting the state is not undone overnight. Nor, unfortunately, over a few years. But in its pursuit of EU status Romania is attempting to resolve its large numbers of children who were entrusted to the state for the food, clothing and shelter that their impoverished parents could not provide. What's a little by U.S. standards can go a long way, so anything you can send will make a difference to us in Prejmer.

### Contact Casa Mea at:

Str. Broastei, Nr. 354, Prejmer 507165, Romania  
Phone: 40.268.362.746 ... or ... 40.741.118.861  
[www.casamea.org](http://www.casamea.org)

### Or contact Casa Mea USA at:

6705 Shadow Crest Drive, Plano TX 75093  
Phone: 972.306.6705

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Julia's also been busy discovering the joy of making mud pies this spring! So far she hasn't tasted one (and hopefully she won't)!



# CASA MEA NEWS

Fall 2006 Greetings from Jan and Julia:

## Then and Now ... the Story of Casa Mea

### Then...2001

#### The trip that conceived Casa Mea

*Sat., Sept. 22: It is the autumn equinox and I am on my way to Romania for two weeks with seven other women I have only just met.*

*Sun., Sept. 23: After a pleasant and smooth flight we finally arrived in Bucharest on this beautiful sunny fall day. After what seemed like hours gathering our luggage and getting through customs, we were off to Brasov, another two and a half hours away. The countryside is beautiful with old fashioned haystacks in the fields and horse-drawn carts. It is also evident that it is very poor. A beautiful – but poor place!*

*When I arrived at the apartment where I was to spend the next two weeks, my misgivings must have shown on my face. The Romanian woman I was with said "It isn't so bad." But to me it was! The apartment is dark and extremely small, mainly one room. There are two single couches in the main room; one for each of us to sleep on. The kitchen and bathroom are nothing more than hallways. My first thought is that the master closet at home is bigger than this apartment. The hallways of the building are dark and dank. There is a constant odor of cooking cabbage.*

*Mon., Sept. 24: Breakfast of bland cheese and wonderful fresh bread. At 4 p.m. we gathered at the orphanage for children from birth to age three. I spent two hours feeding and changing babies... without safety pins!*

*Tues., Sept. 25: Today we met with a social worker and a very attractive, young reporter. Both of them expressed surprise that we came, given the events of Sept. 11th. The reporter said that what all the children in the orphanages need is love. How astute for such a young person! Perhaps it is just so obvious?!*



*The 0-3 orphanage is huge; three buildings with about 300 children. It is very short on supplies and staff.*

*The orphanage was warm and stuffy today. It seems like an endless cycle of feeding and changing hot and sweaty babies. I am astounded at the different ways you can put on a diaper without safety pins. There are no plastic pants either, so when a baby is wet, everything gets wet, including me! One thing for certain is that the babies have to learn to care for themselves, i.e., suck their thumbs or rock back and forth, because no one else is there for them. The babies are on a rigid feeding and diapering schedule and that's about it. The staff is so overworked. The babies are so precious. I cannot believe no one wants them. I am sure if we put all of the babies on a plane to the U.S., people would love and adopt them in no time!*

### Sight, Smell, Sound, Taste, Touch

*Wed., Sept 26: Last night we returned to orphanage after dinner because someone forgot something there. I almost lost it, driving into the orphanage at night with all the babies crying because there is no one to rock them to sleep or comfort them.*

*These babies hear crying constantly and smell only urine and feces. There is no music or bonding with*



one person. Most of them cannot even fall asleep in your arms because it is so foreign to them. It is so pitifully sad!



*The orphanage staff is so over-worked. Although supplies are badly needed, simple tasks like sorting donated clothing are difficult to fit into their days.*

*Fri., Sept 28: Today was quite the day. A family was in the orphanage this morning to adopt a baby. Everyone on the staff was so happy and many pictures were taken. As soon as that baby left, two babies who had been abandoned in the maternity hospital arrived by ambulance. They were each two months old. Shortly after that two more arrived from the children's hospital. They were each about four months old. It was so sad: one leaves and four arrive.*

*At the end of the day, I just cried and cried. I feel that "they need me and I must be there for them." The real point is that their lives will go on whether I am here or not. It is so heartbreaking. Their parents allow this system; Romanian society allows this system; and the world community allows this system. What can be done?*

*Sat., Sept 29: On any given day we may not have electricity or water in the apartment. As I'm used to a daily shower, it is quite embarrassing not to bathe or wash my hair every day.*

*It is such a beautiful country with so much ugliness and poverty. I cannot imagine how people can live with the ugliness and pollution when out their windows is the beauty of nature all around them.*

*Sun., Sept 30: I had a great weekend seeing some of the countryside and sampling the local dishes. I only hope I don't get sick from all the things I ate and drank, including mineral water straight from the underground spring. The woods and fields and mountains are absolutely breathtaking. And the food is delicious – lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. I loved it! But I am anxious to get back to the babies tomorrow.*

*Tues., Oct. 2: Today was glorious. We were allowed to take the babies outside. The poor darlings all got their vitamin shots. I wonder why they don't simply give them vitamin drops?!*

*There are so many children begging on the streets. As bad as the orphanage is, these gypsy children would perhaps be better off there than in the streets. Every dumpster we pass has gypsies camped out in front of it. They search the garbage for anything useful. What a horrible way to live!*



*At lunch three beautiful gypsy girls begged us for food. I bought some pastries for them.*

*This evening we had our thank you party for all of our Romanian hosts. My roommate and I went as Dracula. It was a smashing success! We had tons of food, lots of songs (first Romanian and then American), vodka straight, plum brandy, and even some dancing. I cannot get over how gracious all the Romanians have been to us. Everywhere we go, we are offered food and drink. Occasionally we are even given a gift. They are a beautiful people who love to have fun! Even the staff at the orphanage are hospitable and seem genuinely glad to see us each day.*



*Thurs., Oct. 4: My little gypsy friends are now following me all over town. They are so beautiful!*

*Fri., Oct. 5: Our last full day in Brasov. Yesterday we said goodbye to the staff and babies at the orphanage. It was very tearful. I am sad to be leaving. I saw my gypsy girls again today and am sad to be leaving them too.*

*One of our new Romanian friends said that she liked Americans but wished they were a little more "Latin crazy." I couldn't agree more!*

*We were invited to a barbecue for some volunteers who were here from Northern Ireland. (Actually I think we got wind of their party and crashed it.) It was fun...more good food and singing and dancing.*

*Mon., Oct. 8: Yesterday President Bush started bombing Afghanistan. On the news tonight it was reported that "we are at war." I am so glad I made it in and out of Romania during a three-week hiatus from the world's affairs!*

*It is so good to be home. I wanted to kiss the U.S. soil when we got out of the airport! We are all so lucky to live in such a prosperous country with so many opportunities. Although I am so glad to be back home, the place I love, I am sad and weepy. I can't stop crying for my little babies.*

*All in all, it was an experience of a lifetime and really opened my eyes to the plight of not only Romania's forgotten, unwanted children, but the world's forgotten, unwanted children. This experience held so much that was new for me, and yet it was so sad. The country is so beautiful; its people so warm and loving. Somehow it does not "square" with the situation in the orphanages...but then the majority of Romanians haven't even been in one of them. Maybe they really don't know.*

## **and Now...2006**

### **Casa Mea's on a roll, but needs your help!**

August 2006: Hello Everyone! We have been busy here this summer getting the new roof on. Do you like it? We sure do and it is such a blessing not to have raindrops on our heads!



We still need the roof windows installed before we can start work on the bedrooms and baths below. Additionally, we need to put in the hot and cold water lines and central heating in the main house.



We finished the bunkhouse which sleeps nine people and will soon house its second set of guests. The bunkhouse bathroom is completed, but needs a door and heat. Winter is just around the corner. We will need heat before winter or the pipes will freeze. Another group of volunteers is planning to return to work on the main house, but we'll need materials such as sheet-rock and lumber to take advantage of their presence.

In July, a social agency in Brasov approached Casa Mea about taking a two-month old infant. Two weeks later, a woman in Bucharest called to ask if Casa Mea had room for three children under the age of four. We would gladly have taken the children but do not have the house ready. We are trying to establish residency in Romania so that Casa Mea can, hopefully, accept children before the house is completely done. But the Romanian government residency process includes costs for the paperwork, notary, and health insurance.

Unfortunately, our coffers are nearly empty. We need funds to get us into fall and to finish the work before it gets too cold. If you know of any funding source, please contact it/them now. We can use whatever help you can give us.

On a happier note, a Brasov furniture store donated 12 children's bunkbeds. We could only take 10 because the truck we hired wouldn't hold any more! These are brand new, complete with mattresses. Now we can use the other wooden bunkbeds for all the adults. The children's beds are safer because they have a bar on the top bunk to prevent falls!

**If there is any way you or someone you know can help, we would certainly appreciate it.**  
**Lots of love, Jan**



## Abandonment is a Cultural Norm

Romanian laws regarding international (non-resident) adoptions are complex. They also do not allow the permanent adoption of any child whose parents have not formally relinquished custody, and it is considered culturally acceptable, even normal, for parents to abandon their children to the state's care without fully renouncing their family ties. Children whose parents have any type of periodic contact with them are not "available" for adoption. The cultural traditions and legal system are complex. The result is thousands of children receiving food, clothing, and shelter, but not the love and nurturing necessary to healthy human development, despite the best efforts of overwhelmed orphanage staffs. The lasting effects of a lack of bonding and nurturing during the formative years are well-documented. Children in the orphanages are at risk of developing social and behavioral abnormalities including attachment disorders, inattention and hyperactivity, autistic-like behaviors, and other emotionally crippling characteristics.

## Casa Mea is Part of the Solution

Although she could not know it at the time, Jan's trip to Brasov in September five years ago changed her life in ways most of us cannot imagine. After a second trip in 2002, she returned home to found Casa Mea. By March 2003, Jan had sold her home and many belongings and moved to Brasov to pursue her vision of creating a home for between 10 to 12 abandoned children. Casa Mea aims to take children who would not normally be adopted and whose parents are willing to give up full custody – to give the children a permanent home to grow up in, without the emotionally unstable combination of hope and uncertainty created by the constant possibility of being adopted or transferred to another orphanage.



Anne and Hayley traveled to Casa Mea from Dallas, TX, this summer to provide toddler tips, computer consulting, and to get good and dusty doing sheetrocking and insulating work. They were our first volunteer guests in the bunkhouse!

Much has been accomplished since that first trip five years ago. The home that is now Casa Mea was purchased in 2003 and has undergone extensive renovations; when it is finished, authorities will allow more children to call Casa Mea "my home." Little Julia, now two (whose mentally unstable mother is unaware that she gave birth to a child and whose father is unknown, making it possible for Casa Mea to adopt her) is thriving in Casa Mea's care. We eagerly await the day when more children can be embraced and given the love and nurturing every child needs.



Julia enjoying a hot summer day in Prejmer.

## You Can Help.

If you would like to help, please contact us to make a donation or to see what you could participate in or sponsor.

### Contact Casa Mea at:

Str. Broastei, Nr. 354, Prejmer 507165, Romania  
Phone: 40.268.362.746 ... or ... 40.741.118.861  
[www.casamea.org](http://www.casamea.org) or [jan@casamea.org](mailto:jan@casamea.org)

### Or contact Casa Mea USA at:

6705 Shadow Crest Drive, Plano TX 75093  
Phone: 972.306.6705

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## CASA MEA NEWS

Holiday 2006 Greetings from Casa Mea:

**Counting our Blessings this Holiday Season;  
*Sending You Ours, Asking for Yours ...***

### Our Newest Blessing, Costin!



Costin (pronounced coasting) is our newest addition to the Casa Mea family. He arrived on August 19th and was just a month old. Like Julia, Costin's mother abandoned him in the maternity hospital. Although Costin was born outside of the maternity hospital, he spent his first month of life there recovering

from an infection which he acquired due to the unclean circumstances of his birth.

Costin's mother lives on the streets and has had seven children, all of whom she has abandoned. Costin's oldest siblings live on the streets, whereas the younger ones live with a Romanian couple who run a day shelter for street children.

Costin is a beautiful, blue-eyed baby. He has all the makings of a future couch potato ... he is mesmerized by the TV and loves to eat! (In fact, he is eating us out of house and home.) And when he is hungry, he lets all of Prejmer know



about it! He weighed 6 pounds 1 ounce at birth and was 18 inches long. By September 12th at two months of age, he had gained over 4.5 pounds and grown four inches! Daily, he continues to fill out. Initially, Costin was colicky but after a short adjustment period to his new life at Casa Mea, he is happy, contented, and has begun to coo and smile and laugh. (Luckily for all of us, he is also beginning to sleep through the night!)



### Our Blessing of Big Sister Julia, Mommy's Little Helper

At first, Julia didn't know what was going on. Every time Costin cried, she cried too. Every time someone held Costin, she wanted to be held. But she too has charmingly adjusted and is now the perfect big sister.

Julia is right there in the thick of things (sometimes more of a hindrance than a help, but how do you discourage a two-year-old from helping?) She loves to get right in Costin's face and kiss him, she must hold his bottle for him, she burps him multiple times a day, she dresses him (despite the fact that she isn't dressing herself yet!) and she pushes him around in his walker all day long! Casa Mea's giggle factor has multiplied, and we are truly blessed to have Julia and Costin.



## Our Blessings of Pya and Adrian

Pya and Adrian, a lovely couple from Bucharest with two children of their own, agreed to be Costin's godparents. They are not related to Costin, nor do they know any of his family. Nonetheless, they have lavished Costin with many gifts and much of their love. We are so grateful for their willingness to undertake this extremely important role in Costin's life.



*Above: Costin with his godparents, Pya and Adrian.*



*Left: Pya and Costin after his bath on Baptism Day in early September.*

## Our Blessings of Volunteers, Donors and Sponsors

### Blessings from Britain

In September a group of six volunteers from England arrived at Casa Mea. All but one of them had been here two or three times before to help get Casa Mea's house in shape. They are now like old friends of Casa Mea, and have become like aunt and uncles to Julia. It was a joy to see them again.



*A big thanks to our friends from England (from left to right): Chris, Richard, Andy, Di, Bryan, and David!*

This lovely team sponsored our upstairs needs: in addition to putting up a new ceiling, painting the walls, and sanding the floors, they brought us donations of children's clothing and cash. Now all four bedrooms/playrooms on the next level are ready and hopefully, the bathrooms will be completed soon. When that floor is ready, we will have plenty of space for more children.



### Blessings from Bridget

Another long-time volunteer, Bridget Wickert, came to Brasov in July to stay for

a year. She has updated Casa Mea's bookkeeping system and has put in countless hours updating our mailing lists. She has consolidated our separate lists into a wonderful master database including your preference regarding receiving the Casa Mea News by e-mail or in hard copy by post.



Please help us maximize this generous investment of Bridget's time and let us know of any errors. *Thank you, Bridget, for this generous gift to Casa Mea and for the pleasure of your companionship these months!*

### **Blessings from Minnesota**

In October, Jan traveled to the U.S. for another fundraising trip, including an evening in Edina, Minnesota, sponsored by Don and Elizabeth St.



Angelo. Elizabeth is on the Casa Mea board; she is an ordained minister, a gifted teacher and spiritual counselor whose leadership and community-fostering work has been a tremendous benefit to

Casa Mea and many other organizations. *Thank you, Don and Elizabeth, for your generous sponsorship of this most enjoyable evening. Our thanks also go out to your guests for their contributions to the evening's success – and for helping accomplish yet more on our to-do list back in Romania!*



*Trick or Treat, Anyone?*

### **Blessings from Texas**

Yet another long-time Casa Mea volunteer and supporter, Susan Flanagan, donated the children's Halloween costumes. Our pensive princess and little striped kitty kat had a great time dressing up and touring the neighborhood in search of tricks and treats. *Thank you, Susan, for your continuing love and support!*

## **Blessings from All of YOU!**

We had many other volunteers help Casa Mea, both here and from afar throughout the year. From those who sent donations or wielded hammers and brushes, to those who hosted fundraising events, all of you have our deepest appreciation for your help in creating "Casa Mea" – "my home" – for Julia and Costin, and the children yet to join us here. We are, indeed, well blessed!



*Thank you to all of our volunteers and supporters!*



## *Happy Holidays from Casa Mea!*



2006 brought Santa and many blessings to us early this year in Prejmer with the arrival of Bridget in July, Costin in August, volunteers and fund-raisers throughout the year. Your donations of funds,

goods and clothing, labor and materials, time and love have warmed our hearts – and, quite literally, our hearth! ***Thank you!***

We are playing in the snow, enjoying the seasonal changes and holiday preparations, and looking ahead to the New Year – with gratitude for our blessings and hopes to bring blessings to the lives of more children in 2007.

***Please continue to send us your good wishes this holiday season, as we send ours to you and yours ...*** and keep the donations coming! We have an ambitious to-do list and now with the doubled rewards of watching two wonderful little ones bloom and flourish, we have that much more motivation to make the Casa Mea dream come true for more of Romania's abandoned children!



### **To help, contact Casa Mea at:**

Str. Broastei, Nr. 354, Prejmer 507165, Romania  
Phone: 40.268.362.746 ... or ... 40.741.118.861  
[www.casamea.org](http://www.casamea.org) or [jan@casamea.org](mailto:jan@casamea.org)

### **Or contact Casa Mea USA at:**

6705 Shadow Crest Drive, Plano, TX 75093  
Phone: 972.306.6705

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## *Happy Holidays from Casa Mea!*