

## Season's Greetings!



Happy Holidays!



Craciun Fericit!



Feliz Navidad!

## Thank You to Our Volunteers

By Erin



Robert, Livia and Erin decorate the tree

When I traveled to Romania nearly three months ago to teach English at Casa Mea, I had already spent hours preparing myself for what I would find. I had pored through every photo of the children that live here that I could find, I had committed their names and faces to memory. I had watched videos and tried to get an understanding of where each child had come from, what each child was like. When I arrived, I found that none of that was necessary, because each of them was not only willing but eager to show me. Ana, with her quiet worry over the state of the other kids, Vlad with his desire to impress me with his gymnastic abilities every chance he has, Cristina, who wants to braid my hair every day, and Mihaela, who wants to show me how she can do everything herself. Stelian, who wants to spend every minute learning English and will make an effort to speak to me every chance he gets, and Livia, who much prefers to dance if given the choice. And Robert, the youngest child here, who can't decide if he wants you to hold him or if he wants to show you how he can climb trees and the swing set without any help at all.

When I told my family and friends that I would be living with the children and spending my time not only teaching them English but also playing with them, eating with them, reading to them, and learning from them, many were concerned. They told me it'd be too hard for me to see children who had lived such difficult lives, that it would haunt me and be too difficult to come to terms with.



Erin teaches a class

They wondered if the living conditions would be up to my standards, having been raised in a life of comfort and, honestly, excess for over two decades. What I've found here at Casa Mea would shock all of them into silence and would ease everyone's mind, and not just because the home is a wonderful haven for them, full of comfort, warm food, and loving people. The children here are kids who have been given so little by those who should be giving them everything in the world, kids who have every reason to see the world as a cruel and hateful place, and yet the children are full of nothing but love. They want nothing but to hug me, to show me their school work and their art projects, to teach me the Romanian words for the foods we eat and the toys we play with. They want to play games with me, and they tell me every day that they love me. They are excited to learn English with me not because they know how valuable such a skill will be later in life, but because they are eager to learn to speak with me now. They want to tell me about their days, to include me in all the things that interest them most.



I thought, when I came to Casa Mea, that I had a lot to offer the children. I believed that I could teach them English, teach them about life, and show them love, but the children here have taught me far more than I have the capacity to teach them. Every time they paint my nails, or braid my hair; every time they borrow a scarf, or ask to look at pictures of my family and my dog on my phone, I am overwhelmed by how eagerly they've accepted me into their lives, and how willingly they've shown me their undivided love and affection. They are living proof, every single day, of the importance of the effort that I've made. Six months in Romania is such a small gesture, when you look at my life as a whole, and yet it's making an incredible impact. I've truly learned how important it is to think of these children as more than a number, as individual people who are capable of living truly amazing lives, and how Casa Mea has given them the freedom and the means to do so.

When I told my father about Casa Mea, and about all that Jan and the organization have done in a relatively short time to change these children's lives, he told me that he believed that my path was supposed to cross Jan's—that my experience here would be something that would guide me through the rest of my life, that I would learn things about charity and non-governmental organizations through my time here and through the people of Casa Mea that I couldn't have learned at home. I can say with absolute certainty that he was right, and I hope to always be a part of such an amazing organization, to always spend my life working toward helping those who are too young and too powerless to help themselves. There is no reward for such work that could ever compare to the pure joy I see on their faces every day. The idea that someone who has been through more than I'll probably ever have to face can be the one telling me to smile, asking me what's wrong, or telling me *I'm sorry* when they hear that I have a cough, or a stomachache, is so surprising, and so refreshing, that I will never question if I made the right decision to come here. As far as I'm concerned, there was no other decision to be made.

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By Michael

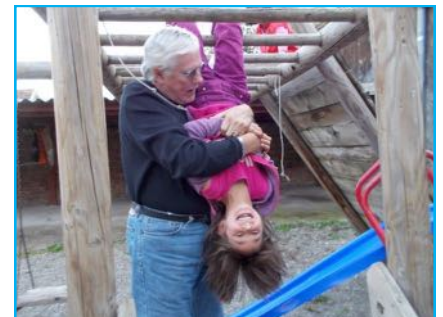
The one way flight from Dallas to Casa Mea in Prejmer, Romania is 6,000 miles. Flying time itself is 12 hours, the layover in Amsterdam plus the car ride of 2 ½ hours from Bucharest to Prejmer through the Carpathian Mountains makes the trip in reality 24 hours door to door. AND WORTH EVERY MINUTE OF IT.

My wife, Melanie, has been associated with Casa Mea for over 10 years and has travelled numerous times to Prejmer. This was my first trip, but certainly not my last.

Your contributions over the years have renovated a farm house to contain a kitchen (where each child has nightly responsibilities like setting the table), a living area with TV, separate boys and girls bedrooms, a guest room, bunkhouse for volunteers and most recently, again funded by you, a classroom for the Casa Mea and neighborhood children desiring to learn English.

Despite their individual backgrounds, despite their prior circumstances, despite their inner pains, and fears of loneliness and uncertainty, these children are really INCREDIBLE.

Ana Marie, age 10, speaks wonderful English and to some extent acts as a "mother" to the children even at her young age. She is on her way to becoming a beautiful young lady.



Michael and Mihaela, the "Funky Monkey"

Then there is Vlad, age 12. He loves football and basketball and wants to play in the NFL. He is quite athletic and energetic. He and I spent a lot of time throwing a football.

Cristina, age 9, is a quiet, lovely child who tries and periodically succeeds in whistling through the gap in her two front teeth.

Stelian, (Steli) is 7. He is a thin, funny boy who seems to be in perpetual motion.

Robert (Robi) is 6 and the brother of Ana. Robi is a “hunk” and the “energizer bunny.”

Livia is Stelian’s twin sister. She is never ever quiet and talks all the time. Unfortunately, I did not have a clue as to what she was saying!

Lastly, Mihaela is an 8 year old, or little Miss “Funky Monkey,” a term of endearment we gave each other.

During our 7 days there we saw poverty, especially at the nearby gypsy village and small children begging for food outside a Brasov restaurant. But what I saw at Casa Mea was a warm, loving, homey environment and a secure sanctum for these 7 incredible children.

I can assure and guarantee you that every cent of every dollar you contribute goes to the “Lucky 7,” their care, education, feeding, and security. Each has made a circuitous but wondrous journey in their own right to Casa Mea.

Each is a beloved child of God.

Your help is truly, truly appreciated in their cause.



The children spend time doing arts & crafts

## Thank You to Our Donors

Out of the goodness of her heart, Diane hosted a fundraising event for Casa Mea/Mi Casita at her home. As an accomplished organist, she entertained the attendees with beautiful music. Some sang along and eventually some took to the floor to dance! It was a beautiful afternoon of friendship, music, singing and dancing!



Diane & Evon Dancing

Without the support of our donors, Casa Mea could not survive. We truly appreciate all of your contributions of whatever kind and thank you for helping us provide loving homes to children in need.



Diane hosting a fundraiser

Wishing you all the best this holiday season and in the coming new year.

## Something to Think About Before You Make Your Holiday Donations

<u>THE AMERICAN RED CROSS</u>	<u>MARCH OF DIMES</u>	<u>THE UNITED WAY</u>	<u>UNICEF</u>	<u>GOODWILL</u>
President and CEO Marsha J. Evans' salary for the year <b>was \$651,957</b> plus expenses	It is called the March of Dimes because <b><u>only a dime for every 1 dollar is given to the needy.</u></b>	President Brian Gallagher receives a \$375,000 base salary along with numerous expense benefits.	CEO Caryl M. Stern receives \$1,200,000 per year (100k per/month) plus all expenses including a ROLLS ROYCE. <b><u>Less than 5 cents of your donated dollar goes to the cause.</u></b>	CEO and owner Mark Curran profits \$2.3 million a year. Goodwill is a very catchy name for his business. You donate to his business and then he sells the items for PROFIT. He pays nothing for his products and pays his workers minimum wage! <b><u>\$0.00 goes to help anyone!</u></b>

***WHEREAS every dollar you donate to CASA MEA goes directly to supporting the children Casa Mea serves.***



The children open gifts for St. Nicholas Day



Mihaela and Livia decorate for the holidays



Mihaela and Ana Maria show off their baking project

To send your financial gift to Casa Mea...

- By Check: Payable to **Casa Mea** at 6705 Shadow Crest Drive, Plano, TX 75093
- By Credit Card: Donate online by clicking [HERE](#) or visit [www.casamea.org](http://www.casamea.org) and click on "Make a Donation"
- Other Donations: Contact Jan at 612-227-3239 or email [jan@casamea.org](mailto:jan@casamea.org) to arrange for a monthly automatic bank withdrawal, donation of appreciated stock, or other type of financial donation.

All contributions to Casa Mea are tax-deductible. Thank you!