

October 22, 2009

Dear Friends and family,

Mike has been in Romania for 2 months! After weeks of exchanging short emails and having occasional short Skype conversations, Mike had time on Monday afternoon and evening to talk to me on Skype for nearly 4 hours! What a blessing it was to see him, talk to him, ask him questions. We have known that he is fine but busy, but we did not have a sense of his daily life and we could not quite understand why he did not seem to have much time to keep up with Mom and Dad in Florida. After this lengthy visit, I really feel like we were able to reconnect and we have a much better idea of his daily life and his ministry in Romania.

Mike is very happy and he is loving his time in Romania. He feels that he is just where God wants him to be at this time doing the work that God has prepared for him to do.

During the time that Mike and I were able to talk, I asked him many questions about different aspects of his life in Romania.

Living in Bucharest

Adjusting to living in Bucharest has been a big challenge for Mike. He says that almost everywhere that he goes he is outside of his “comfort zone”. Navigating the city is mentally and physically exhausting. He is always crossing the sprawling city of about two million people going from one activity to the next at some distance. The subways are very crowded and in the morning the trains are so packed that you cannot lift your arms. There are many pickpockets in the city and on the trains, so he is always on guard. He takes a combination of metro (subway), buses and trams (streetcars) to get where he is going. Because the trams run less frequently at night, a trip that takes 20 minutes in the daytime, such as the trip from Coxes to Mike’s apartment, can take an hour at night. His morning commute to BCA (Bucharest Christian Academy), which takes 35 minutes before the heavy morning traffic starts, can take 1 and ½ hours if he leaves home 5 minutes late!

On the positive side, Mike says that consumer goods are very reasonable in Bucharest. He has found good stores, malls, a barber shop, and little restaurants that sell cheap, filling food! He has gone bowling and plays ultimate Frisbee and soccer in the park with Coxes, Smiths and other missionary families. He has made many nice friends. He socializes with many BCA families, including the Coxes, who have welcomed him so warmly and really made him feel comfortable. He states that at the Coxes home he feels he is with family and feels completely comfortable with them. He and Jon and Joel, the Cox teenage boys, are good friends and he loves spending time with the whole family. Jen is an amazing cook, Mike says! Dave and Jen are Mike’s ReachGlobal city team leaders and they have given of themselves so generously on Mike’s behalf. ReachGlobal is the international ministry organization of the Evangelical Free Church, with its headquarters in Minneapolis.

Mike’s Apartment

Mike has been able to talk with the woman who owns his apartment. She is a Romanian woman who lives in California. She is very happy to be able to donate the use of her apartment to a young missionary. Mike likes his apartment very much, but he says that it is very quiet there and he sometimes feels a little lonely. Fortunately, he often stays over at friend's houses and sometimes sleeps overnight at the school, since they need someone there overnight on a regular basis. He does receive the letters and cards that I mail to him at his apartment address. They can be sent with a 98 cent international postage stamp. I know he would love to receive cards and letters of encouragement, if anyone would care to send him one... Mike's address is:

Aleea Poiana Cernei, Nr. 2
Bloc Z4, Ap. 19
Sector 6, Bucharest
Romania

His email address is musakkrazy@aol.com

Mike's Ministries

BCA

Mike's primary focus right now is his ministry as a teacher at Bucharest Christian Academy. He is working with wonderful, supportive people and serious students. He is being mentored in teaching skills. Mike feels that the students at BCA take their studies more seriously than their American counterparts. This is Mike's school schedule:

8 to 8:15 - prayer time and devotions

8:15 to 9:00 - observes elementary classes to learn teaching ideas, strategies and discipline.

9 to 11 - assists or teaches 7th and 8th, and then 9th and 10th grade Physical Education. The kids walk 10 minutes to a park to take P.E. class because there is no gym at their current facility. They have just finished field hockey and are starting badminton. Mike loves working with these classes.

11-12 - supervises 4th and 5th grade class so that the elementary principal can teach other students a math class. He watches them while they work on math, draw pictures or do free writing. He then prays with them and takes them to lunch.

12 to 1 – meets with Laura Westrom, elementary principal, to work on lesson plans and ideas for his classes. He is finding it challenging to teach music to the 2nd and 3rd graders and less difficult to teach the 4th thru 6th graders.

1 to 2 – assists and participates in the senior high music class. He is a member of their 9 person choir. They are preparing songs in 4 parts for a winter and spring concert and a choir festival which they will travel to in the spring semester. Mike is singing tenor.

-Mike teaches his music class to 2nd and 3rd graders and 4th to 6th graders on Tuesday and Friday.

-He frequently sits in on an elementary Romanian class taught to the students at BCA.

- Mike is also leading the elementary worship team and preparing to take over the senior high worship team which he is currently co-leading. Mike was the worship leader at a 100 person BCA family retreat 3 weekends ago. Worship practice is after school on Tuesdays.

-On Wednesday afternoons the teachers have a staff and prayer meeting and they pray for each other's concerns.

The missionaries at BCA are an amazing group of dedicated people who are spending between 2 years and their entire careers in Bucharest. It is a supportive, close knit community that has welcomed Mike warmly and frequently invites him over to eat, socialize and to spend the night at their homes. He receives much emotional support from many of these people.

Music Outreach

Mike is working with a missionary named Ed Smith, who is planning a music outreach to young mainstream Bucharest musicians. They have been meeting regularly since Mike arrived in Bucharest. The planning stages are now complete. They have found a rehearsal space and the practices begin next Monday night. Mike was able to see some of the musicians perform when he first arrived in Romania and Ed Smith took him to a music festival out of town in Brasov, a resort town in the mountains about 3 hours North of Bucharest. Some of these people are up and coming musicians in Bucharest who have received some acclaim.

Open Heaven Worship Team

Mike is attending a bilingual church (English and Romanian) called Open Heaven. Many people from BCA attend this church. He is the lead acoustic guitarist for their worship team. Mike plays with Ed Smith on this worship team. Worshipping at Open Heaven is very interesting for him because some of the worship songs are in Romanian, some are half-Romanian, half English and some are in English. The worship team practices after school on Thursday nights. The Pastor of the church, Pastor Adi Caciula, is meeting with Mike for one-on-one bible study. He would like Mike to give him guitar lessons.

Orphanage Ministry

On Saturday mornings, Mike has made a commitment to volunteer in a Bucharest orphanage. He goes to the orphanage with a group of volunteers from BCA. They play board games with children ages 6 to 17. Mike has been told that babies who are given up by their families go to a special place in the hospital until the parents give up their parental rights. Then the children go to the orphanage. They live in small bedrooms with about 6 children per room. The orphanage, Mike reports, is not horrible, but it is pretty dismal....Some of the older children are aggressive

and torment the younger ones. Some of the children are very sweet and some are very quiet. The children stay at the orphanage until age 18, when they are sent to a trade school.

When we traveled to Romania to adopt Mike in 1991, there were 100,000 children in Romanian orphanages. About 12,000 to 15,000 of those children were adopted by families from many countries. Sadly, the Romanian government decided that it was an embarrassment to adopt out the children and it became illegal to adopt internationally from Romania. However, due to continuing difficult economic conditions, many families can't keep their children and so children are still spending their lives in these institutions.

Mike says that volunteering at the orphanage is very difficult emotionally for those who do it, but very rewarding. He loves going, but he says that he frequently needs to take a moment to collect his thoughts and calm his heart, because he is acutely aware that but for the grace of God, he would have spent his entire childhood in such an institution. When he tells the children his name, Michael and that he is an American, they clamor around him saying, "Michael Jackson?????" He has 3 or 4 children that have become very attached to him, including an 8 year old girl named Kristina.

So this is how Mike is spending his days and nights!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

After hearing about his activities, we no longer wondered why Mike has not been in touch as much as we might have hoped!!!

In closing, I asked Mike to tell me words that described how he is doing...I asked him are you happy, lonely, strong, vulnerable, encouraged, tired, growing spiritually, excited about teaching...and he answered that he is all of these things!

He says he is going to bed at 9 or 10pm, "like an old man", because his brain and his body are so tired! But he is very happy and very glad that he followed God's call to ministry in Romania.

Mike will be in Florida for 10 days from December 21 to January 1 and then will return to Romania until at least June of 2010. He is considering asking to stay for a second year at BCA, but no decision will be made for many months. His Romanian contacts have stressed that all decisions should be made based on discerning God's will for Mike and what is best for Mike's future plans.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading about Mike's adventures!

Thank you to all of you for the support and encouragement that you have shown to Mike and to us during this important time!

Love, Gena and Ron