



As we progressed through the dark canyons of Bucharest to Gheorghita's flat we encountered many sights that ranged from whimsical to interesting. There are a few parks that are lush and green although their overall conditions appear neglected and in need of cleanup. The roads are in poor conditions, uneven, and needing major repairs. The electric trolleys are numerous, brightly painted and always full (previous page). The many shops, usually on the ground floor of the high rises, offer goods and services that best fit a mom-and-pop operation elsewhere. We saw only one major food store, with a security fence and a guarded parking lot. Street vendors proliferated everywhere ... peddling fresh produce, books, soft drinks, repair parts for every sort of appliance, machine or auto. Sidewalk kiosks sprang up like weeds hawking clothes, food, cigarettes, CDs, and every possible commodity that is within the economic reach of the surrounding population. The sounds and the smells were overwhelming ... like a beehive. Driving through a narrow, tree-lined, one-lane street with many twists and turns we arrive at Gheorghita's residence, one of many in this "block" ... a five-story white-washed apartment building that has seen better days but nonetheless appeared bright and welcoming (left).



Carrying our luggage to the fifth floor (no elevator) we were greeted by a small but clean and cozy apartment ... 3 rooms plus a bath and kitchenette (right). The furnishings reminded us of our first apartment in America some 52 years ago. Immediately we felt comfortable. Since the day was hot and humid, and no air conditioning, the apartment was a little stifling ... but the window was open and the fan was running. A cool breeze, an open bottle of mineral water and a comfortable couch told us to sit and relax ... we are with family. Our bedroom was tiny ... a doorway to an enclosed balcony led to a view of adjacent rooftops that peaked over the treetops of the courtyard between buildings. The air was clean, the smell was different, and the many sounds of a large city beckoning.



Saying goodbye to Cristi and Marius, Laurentiu began his two-week assignment ... to interpret. Over many bottles of cold mineral water (the real stuff) some home made wine and a bottle of local beer, we settled in and exchanged the latest news. But before we knew it, out came the food ... a cold appetizer plate, followed by a plate of soup and ending with the customary meat and potatoes. As it was past 8PM and with the 34-hour travel time draining us of energy, we offered our excuses and made our way to bed. But the hospitality would not end just yet. For a first time visitor to Bucharest it must be a shock to learn that a simple commodity as drinking water is controlled by the city to each "block" ... roughly 10,000 residents. That includes "hot water". It was our luck; the "hot water" was out of service for its annual two-week maintenance. We were drenched to the skin and in dire need of a bath or shower. Our hosts recognized that need and outmaneuvered us. Since no "official hot water" was available, they heated two huge pots of water (right) on their small kitchen cook top for our bath. Filling the tub and topping it with additional cold water ... our "bath" was ready. This simple act of generosity and accommodation says a lot of the spirit and the giving nature of the Rozylowicz family in Romania. We were humbled ... but soaked in the tub like a king.

The night was all but restful. In spite of the tiredness sleep eluded us. Not that the accommodations were unsuitable ... the "serenade" outside was a major distraction. To the uninitiated it should be revealed that Bucharest has a canine (dog) population that exceeds 250,000 stray animals. They find a home wherever someone throws them any scraps to eat. This apartment complex had its share of dogs ... and they fought, and they barked, and they howled all through the night. Coupled with car alarms in the far off distance and loud TV's from adjacent buildings, who could sleep. Welcome to Bucharest ... you'll get used to it!

**Our first day in Bucharest** ... started with a breakfast that is best suited to a farmer or a construction worker – hearty. Cold ham and pork roast, meat balls, hard cheese, fried eggs topped with cheese and with compulsory home made wine, mineral water and coffee that you eat not drink. Romanian coffee – scoop a heaping tablespoon of ground coffee into a cup, pour hot water and let it sit for a few minutes. Strong enough to take the enamel off your teeth and whatever is left over may be used as a paint remover. Drink one and you have enough caffeine to launch a rocket. Before leaving the flat, we opened one of our large bags and extended to Gheorghita, Nicu and Laurentiu the many gifts we brought for them. Suffice to say the gifts were thoughtful, useful, and well received. What may have been a moderate expense for us was perceived as extravagance to all ... but, this was for family and cost was not the issue – it was sharing the bounty of the Rozylowicz American success. Stomach full ... it's off to see the city, with Laurentiu as our guide. First stop, University of Bucharest. Trolley takes too long ... taxi is faster and only costs \$1.25 USD for a five mile ride.



Bucharest – City Center (left), like any major cosmopolitan city, is relatively modern in appearance and activity. Banks, shops, commerce and government. Traffic, congestion, peddlers, and beggars ... sidewalk cafes, kiosks, and cultural edifices. The old next to the new ... a Greek Orthodox Church next to a bank, History Museum next to an apartment building. The best description is -- Eclectic. We arrive at the University (right) ... it's not your everyday palace of learning. Large and imposing, its façade dark and aged, it encompasses a huge chunk of the city center. Entering, we are greeted by an aged elevator that whisks us up to Laurentiu's offices. Our first impressions of the interior is mostly benign ... the atmosphere is dim and dusty, walls needing a coat of paint, hallways needing more lighting and the overall atmosphere reminding me of a neglect. "Money is tight", Laurentiu says, "and the University allocates its resources to the faculty and not the physical plant." We enter his offices.



**A few words about Laurentiu!** ... To the bone, Laurentiu is a Rozylowicz ... 29-year old, single, bright, articulate, devoted to his work and loyal to his calling. Laurentiu holds BS and MS degrees and is currently a Ph.D. candidate under Professor Maria Patroescu in the Center For Environmental Research and Impact Studies at the University of Bucharest. He is a Lecturer at the University. Surprisingly, Laurentiu also is a member in the military (reserve, 30-year commitment) as a paratrooper and has made nearly 50 jumps. Although he does not have a driver's license, he is well versed in auto mechanics and has high mechanical aptitudes. He is outgoing and is quick to pick up on "western humor". He is well traveled but the upcoming trip to Ukraine will be his first. Laurentiu does have a lady friend in Brasov but has no immediate nuptial plans ... to the dismay of his father Romeo, who wishes to see a continuation of the Rozylowicz name in Romania. But, to his credit, Laurentiu is open-minded and as his position at the University becomes more secure his intentions may see a shift. Laurentiu has many friends and his "office at the University" is his home ... often until 10PM at night.



**Back at the University!** ... The offices are small, cluttered and busy, busy, busy. Met Professor Patroescu and the rest of the faculty (left) ... all seemed genuinely sincere in greeting us and finally meeting "that American Rozylowicz on the phone". Gave the staff copies of the four scientific abstracts that we brought along that Laurentiu requested (scientific journals are impossible to obtain in Eastern Europe). After a protracted hour-long discussion with the staff on some genteel topics, we said our goodbyes and left.



Bucharest City Center is a walking mecca ... with Laurentiu as a guide we traversed the many main and side streets to get a sense of the heartbeat of the city. We exchanged \$USD for Romanian Lei's (\$1 USD/29,900Lei) ... and with over 3,000,000 Lei in pocket, we shopped for cultural CD's, maps and books. Laurentiu was declared, for this trip, the "National Treasurer in Charge of Funny Money". And then came that moment ... our introduction to the ARO 10 car ... the car we will have to propel across two countries that have "no rules of the road". Introduced to the ARO's idiosyncrasies ... shifting,

operation, controls, etc., we drove the car around the University building and were declared "fit to drive" the roads of Romania ... all in less than 2 minutes. "Sweating bullets" became the byword.

**Seeing some of Bucharest's highlights!** ... With Cristi as the driver, we were not secure in our ability to mingle with the mad drivers of Bucharest as yet, we hopped around the city, here and there, enjoying the sights and absorbing the culture as much as possible. As the hours sped by, one place began to look like the next and our ability to absorb more was overloaded. Taking a reprieve, we found sanctuary at the Satului Museum ... an architectural museum of sorts of showcases the various types of living structures from across Romania over the past two centuries (right). Invigorating, delightful and visually appealing, this diversion was the highlight of the day and we intend to produce a slide-show CD of this tour for those interested in this subject (available in October 2000). Returning to Gheorghita's flat in time for a late-afternoon meal, we again were offered fare that filled and satisfied us. Home made wine as well as beer and bottled wine satisfied our thirst ... preparing us for an exploration of Bucharest at Night and finally meeting Laurentiu's family ... his father (our cousin) Romeo, Romeo's wife Ioana and sister Georgeta. Taking another taxi ... we ventured back into City Center.



**Meeting Romeo and Family!** ... Getting out of the taxi and seeing our cousin across the street was a moving and anxious experience for us. We are certain that they were as anxious as we were but the greeting on that street corner was genuinely moving with handshakes and hugs among us all. Still ... the moment was filled with nervousness, as only Laurentiu stood between two groups of people with a common problem – the language. But we managed to fill the time and distance between that street corner and the watering hole (outdoor café) ... where we would have time to sit and talk ... with light banter. Incidentally ... it was decided to meet in a café because Romeo's flat was undergoing repainting and I declined to put a paint brush in my hand (took a moment or two but Laurentiu and Romeo finally got the humor of my comment).

A couple of hours were spent in that café discussing the various things that only newly found families would discuss ... the intervening years, fathers and grandfathers, Romanian and America lifestyles, cost of living, the hardships in Romania, the "Revolution" and what the future holds. We brought along some of the smaller gifts (watches, silver key rings, "liquid silver" necklaces for the ladies, etc.) and presented them to the delight of Romeo and his family. Their other gifts (clothes) were left at Gheorghita's flat for pickup after we left for Ukraine. It was not too long after that that Romeo and his family had to depart back to their flat ... Ioana had to leave for work early in the morning. We said our goodbyes and promised to meet again upon our return from Ukraine.

**A word about Romanian living standards!** ... We are polite ... we do not ask ... but, it was offered to us as a way of letting us know that things in Romania are not that good, but neither are things that bad. Gheorghita, our cousin, at 58 and Nicu at 62 receive a monthly pension of roughly \$100 USD, which's almost 3,000,000 Lei's. Of that amount, 1,000,000 Lei is spent on medicines (Nicu had a colon operation recently which required him to pay a great portion for the surgery out of his own pocket, before the surgery) ... 1,000,000 Lei is spent of household expenses such as electricity, phone, TV and radio permits, etc. ... which leaves roughly 1,000,000 Lei's for living expenses. Not a pleasant situation but one that they have learned to accept and live within those means. We asked if they considered their situation as being lower or middle class and their response was that. " ... we are happy that things are manageable and that Nicu can get his medication and that our income allows us to get through the expenses of the month. It could be worse ... we are content. Our furniture is old but still useful. Our needs are minimal. We are middle-class in Romania." Romeo's situation is somewhat surprising. At 55 he is on a pension ... although he is still able to work, he was forced to retire from his position as a mechanic in the municipal sanitary (sewer) system because of a slight disability. He is receiving \$90 USD pension monthly. Ioana still works (30 years with same firm) and is due to retire in 2002. Their situation is similar to Gheorghita's in that he considers his position as middle class ... that things could be worse ... that he is overall contented and happy. Incidentally, all those Soviet-style high rise buildings ... what is the typical monthly rent? Actually, all those flats are owned by the people, sort of a Romanian-style condominiums. After the breakup of the Soviet system, all of the properties were put on the market for purchase by the general population. The cost of an average 3½ room flat is roughly in the range of \$12,000 - \$20,000 USD, depending on location, condition, floor, etc. People had to plow their entire savings into purchasing whatever they could afford. Mortgages are virtually unknown and if available, rates are astronomical. This explains why most of the buildings are in such disrepair ... who has any money left over for repairs. Another interesting revelation ... don't complain about the sales tax in your area, the sales tax in Romania is a whopping 19%, on everything! In August 2001, \$1USD = 29,900 lei and rising.

[..... Continued in Section 3](#)