

Hosman, September 2017

Dear friends,

I will never forget that night in April which almost broke my heart. Loud wails of lament sounded throughout the village, I shuddered even to listen to them. Mother, father, siblings, relatives, neighbours bewailed sixteen-year-old Ionci's far too early death. Distinct tragic melodies pervade the night of mourning, accompanied on piano and saxophone; the words to go with them come spontaneously. The following day the whole population of Ziegental / Tichindeal escorted the family with the dead child to the graveyard. Again and again they asked the dead boy: "Why did you leave us so early? What have we done to you? Come back to us, where have you gone?" Ionci had lost his battle against cancer after a year of suffering. Once, he had been able to return from hospital. They had amputated his right leg, but now he scurried after the other children like a weasel on his crutches, happy again.

And now we had bid him good-bye, all night long and at his graveside. The next day, the hard life would continue as before. His mother has given birth to ten children, one of which died at birth. Now she still has eight to care for. Father Luca is proud of his horse, with which he can work for the Romanian farmers and can bring some money home. The three bigger children are herding the sheep and will return in autumn. But their hopes that Ionci could help his father in the stable have now come to nothing.

On the way back from the graveyard Luca asked me how life should now go on. How could I give him comfort? We sat with the weeping family in their miserable hut. I gazed at the garishly coloured hanging on the crumbling wall: Jesus, the Good Shepherd, cares for his sheep on green meadows beside a little brook. Kitschy, but a challenging sight. "Let's build a new house together!" I suggested. Soon afterwards Luca began to tear down the walls. Over the summer, he and our people built a winter proof house, into which family Vuzu has now moved. And Ionci is always present.

Our next project is in the neighbouring village Nocrich. In the Romany ghetto twelve families dwell under miserable conditions. There we have built a social centre. The commune made the building area available and took care of water supply and the sewage connection. Water! That is the very first thing which mothers and children run for. The children are fed and they can study. None of them was ever in school before. Here we had to combat a hepatitis epidemic in spring. With seven families, we have already built houses; the next five we will undertake before winter comes. The new neighbourhood shines in gaily coloured paint and radiates energy. Many things are in motion!

On the last day of school, the director of the School in Nou called us up, overjoyed that the students' results were so good. She thanked Ruth. Some of our children had even passed the entrance exams for the secondary school in Sibiu. Some of them, the director said, play their instruments better than their teachers do. Even Ionuz, our little truant, more often around school than in it in the mornings, will advance to the next class. For the big ones, even those who never attended school, the Stella Matutina has expanded its offerings for housekeeping and vocational training.

Dear friends, I thank you for helping us to find and foster the talents and aptitudes. In the same way may you also succeed in your families, for that we pray with our children.

I greet you sincerely!

P. Georg Sporschill SJ

**All can learn – housekeeping, trades, making music.
That is our program against despair.**

