

Dear friends,

Stray dogs dig in the rubbish scattered around the house. Pieces of chipboard are a makeshift protection from the wind blowing through the holes in the broken brick wall. The roof hangs askew, sheets of plastic provisionally cover leaky spots. Blackened walls still bear witness to the night when the power line burned out. The wooden entrance door can no longer be shut. There is no water supply. The cable hangs low from the utility pole out on the street – they tapped into the electricity themselves.

Iulia brought me here because I wanted to see where she lives with her three children. She is only 21 and still looks like a child herself. We have come from the Mothers' Club in the Sokeres Social Centre.

„Where is your husband?” I asked on the way. „Luckily far away, he is working and won't be here for another two weeks. But by then we will be gone,” she says and winks at me. Not long ago he threw her and the children out in the middle of the night. A few days later, he whispered a few cheesy expressions of love into the phone and Iulia, who had fled to her sister, returned. Where else could she go? She couldn't stay with her sister, whose little hut is already full of children.

We sit down in front of the crumbling house, on the old car seats which are standing about. A journey into the past begins – Iulia talks and talks and talks.

“My childhood was always dark. We lived in a cellar. We were twelve brothers and sisters, always fighting. Dad was crazy, about women, about us girls, about money. He often tormented me – I can't talk about it. One evening he was sitting with a few of his friends. One of the lads, Giani, had a mobile phone which my father really wanted, so he said to Giani: “Give me your phone, then you can have Iulia.” Both of them laughed. So that's how he sold me for a mobile phone. I went along with Giani, what else could I do? It couldn't get any worse than at home anyway. I was thirteen at the time. I had my first child at fourteen. I didn't finish school and because of the children I was never able to work. We always stayed someplace for a short time and then we were kicked out again. Giani was always drinking and making a ruckus.

That's how we ended up here in Marpod, in this old house. There is nobody here to kick us out. But I want to get away, if only because of the children. They shouldn't have to grow up like me. I just don't know where to go."

Iulia is a young mother who cannot escape the vicious circle on her own. Her own mother, still only 35, has run away with the four youngest children and lives on welfare in a shed. From one generation to the next, the girls are unable to cope, cannot get away. They need assistance.

Our new project in Sibiu is called **„Casa Nora“**. Thirty women and children find refuge here. Young mothers like Iulia live on the ground floor. They need a place in which to draw breath, where they no longer live in fear. Across the road are a kindergarten and school where children get a start towards a good future. Students have moved into the upper floor. They come from the villages in which the young people attend school. Their contribution is to accompany and support the mothers and children in the house. They are the best role models for the young girls and their children.

After a long time in the dark, there is light for Iulia. Thanks to you, dear friends, we can make a home for her and many others at „Casa Nora“. Together with our big and small protégés, we wish you and your loved ones light and hope. May the child in the manger light up your hearts as well.

Together with Father Georg, I wish you happy holidays!

Ruth Neubert