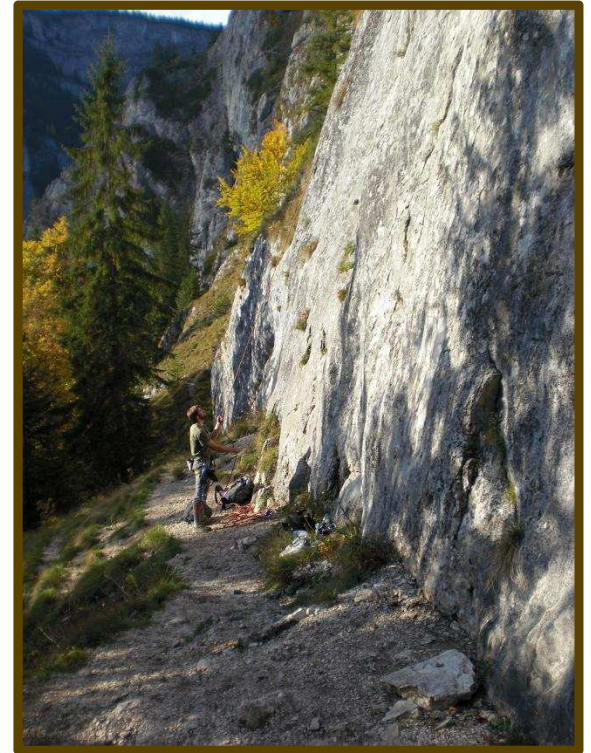


Stories From Romania

Autumn arrived here in Romania with a blaze of color. I told my friend Loredana not long ago that fall was my favorite season of the year, and she replied that she didn't understand why, as fall is the season of death and dying when contrasted with the new growth of spring. That brief discourse caused me to consider what it is about fall that I enjoy, and I have decided that the colors of the forests, the coolness of the morning air, and how I am always reminded of moose hunting season regardless of what country I am in, are not the only reasons for my attraction, but also because as I watch the leaves of the trees die and fall to the ground, I am reminded that there would be no fresh life of spring without the dry decay of fall. Another beautiful picture of our relationship to Jesus Christ portrayed and explained through his Creation. Christ' death on the cross, providing a way for eternal life to blossom in the hearts of his children.



This past summer there were many opportunities for that Gospel to transform the lives of the kids and guest who came to the camps, as well as continuing to speak truth to the volunteer leaders and staff who led them. Here is my attempt to give you a glimpse of this summer and it's happenings as seen from my eyes.



Tineri Exploratori (the teenage tent camp) came and went with a clap of thunder and flash of lighting. Literally. It rained and stormed most every night, then gave gracious respite for the daylight hours before the dark clouds would rush in again over the mountains and unleash their rivers of rain. Everywhere one looked water flowed, mud squished, soaked kids shivered, wet leaders rubbed tiredness out of their eyes, wet tents got wetter, sleeping bags dried slowly, and in the midst of it there was God giving strength and unity to the team. Though the trials weren't extreme, it is in these times that true character becomes more apparent in a person, and I can honestly say

that I felt privileged to serve with the PdF team (Torchbearers in Romania) and the volunteers who gave of their time and energy to serve during that camp. Due to my inexperience and language limitations my role was mostly behind the scenes and I enjoyed the chance to serve in practical ways and to try to be an encouragement to the other leaders who had more direct involvement with the kids.





Max Bike (an international mountain biking camp) followed closely on the heels of Tineri, and quickly became one of the high points of my time in Romania. We were Swiss, Austrians, Germans, Romanians and one American (guess who) receiving the chance to tour through the small Saxon villages of Transylvania by mountain bike. Hans Peter Royer came from Tauernhof, and provided a bible study on Jesus and truth. It was a neat opportunity to get to know

him a little bit through the studies as well as a couple of conversations we had along the tour. The summer weather was hot and beautiful, the rustic countryside provided an atmosphere as if we were traveling back into time, and the people and conversations were diverse, encouraging and beneficial to my broadening education of the global church.

A few days after Max Bike ended; **Mountain Survival** began. (an outdoor survival course) Survival provided me with the challenge of being one of the leaders, but as a rookie, and being unfamiliar with the program and techniques of facilitation. The first five days we spent at the base camp were hard for me due to an accumulation of frustrations with myself for not knowing the language, and feeling very useless at times. Graciously, God provided some needed exhortation and encouragement through one of my colleagues to not allow frustrations to keep me from ministering, or from enjoying what blessings I do have. That helped my attitude to improve considerably as we embarked on our five day mountain tour. The Bucegi (part of the Carpathian Mountains) mountain range has some truly spectacular areas, (keep in mind that I am coming from Alaska) and one of the valleys where we stayed ranks as one of my favorite mountain places anywhere I have been. We also had the blessing of seeing one of the participants give her life to Christ, and that after several years of being very critical and questioning of Christianity.



In the midst of the all of these camps, the Faithful construction team continued their progress on the development of the Center, and we ended the camping season with a series of **Construction camps**. The main project these last couple of months have been the building of a much needed dyke on our side of the river which flows next to the property. Without the dyke, the river when swollen by heavy rains would wash away large portions of the land, causing much damage to the bank and making it impossible to build our much needed bridge. The volunteer members of the construction team went back to Germany at the end of August, and four new fine young men came and are now living and working at the Project Center in Râsnov.

The camps are over, the winter is coming, and I look forward with anticipation to what will come.



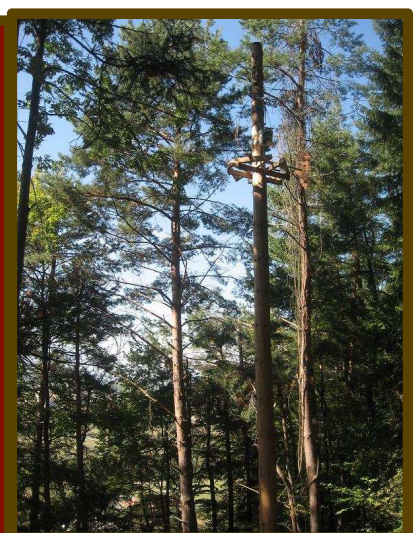
Continuing progress on the Ropes course will be the main agenda on my list this fall. Due to my involvement with the camps, and the general busyness of the summer, we did not advance much with the building of the course. Instead we put the course to use with the three stations we had, and it became a tool to share the gospel and principles of faith with over four hundred guests. **Before the winter**, we plan to finish the platforms and to prepare the stations needed to have the basic course completed, as well as to install the zip line, which will be the exit from the course.

Continuing to connect to the local Romanian community. As I currently live in "kleine Deutschland" occupied by the four Volunteers and Denis Krautter, the project manager, I need to be more intentional about spending time with Romanians. I have started going to a small local Brethren Church in Râsnov, and that has proved to be an interesting cultural experience. The church is very conservative, very small, and very Brethren. It should be an interesting stretch for me to become part of their little congregation. Loredana, the assistant director here at PdF, has offered to continue my education in the Romanian language with lectures twice a week. Which will help considerably, but I need to discipline myself to find and take advantage of opportunities to speak and hear the language. It is all too easy to just get by with English and not stretch myself.



As I was thinking about what to write in this newsletter, I thought that if I were reading someone else's letter, I would like to see what has been impacting and growing their mind and imagination. What better way then by seeing what books they have been reading. So here is my own very short list of books that I have been reading this year of 2008: Thank you to those of you who have recommended these books to me.

- *The Bible (various books and passages)*
- *Searching for God knows what (Donald Miller)*
- *Velvet Elvis (Rob Bell)*
- *Sex God (Rob Bell)*
- *The Four Loves (C.S. Lewis)*
- *The Shack (William P. Young)*
- *The Dogs of Riga (Henning Mankell)*
- *The Divine Conspiracy (Dallas Willard)*





I'll be home for Christmas! Yes it is true, toward the end of November; I will be heading back to the United States to see my much missed family, friends and church before coming back to Romania next January for another season. I have not planned the details of my time in the states, but here is what I do know:

I will see my friend Mirja in Marburg Germany before hopping over the pond to Chicago, from where I then travel down to Bolivar MO for about four days to spend Thanksgiving with eSther Fahim and her family there. I

shall then fly up to Alaska and will be in the Palmer area through Christmas and New Years. eSther will join me and my family for the month of December, and will celebrate Christmas with us. I shall return to Romania around the 15th of January. If I am in your neck of the woods, and you would like me to drop by, then write me an email and we will see what is possible. Of course if you live in or near Palmer, then I already plan on visiting you, so keep the coffee pot on.

How can you help? First of all I would like to thank you all for your support and prayers over the summer. For those of you back in Sweden who have been a big encouragement to me, and to LMBC I owe a big thanks for your prayer and financial support. Thank you!

Pray!

- For the **construction projects** in general here at the center, that God would continue to provide the solutions to the seemingly impossible difficulties.
- **For me and the Ropes course project.** For safety, as much of the time I will be by myself as I work on the platforms and stations. Also for initiative, confidence and a willingness to make mistakes in my work, as I am very cautious by nature, and when I am unsure about something, then I often stop and don't allow myself to continue for fear of "it not turning out perfect". And while being cautious and wanting to do a good job the first time is fine and well, there comes a point of needing to take action and not allowing an unwillingness to make mistakes waste valuable time.
- **For my connection to the church here.** That I have the courage to put myself in situations where I normally wouldn't.
- **For eSther and our relationship.** The last couple of months have not been easy for us as we tackle the challenges of long distance communication. Pray for us as we are together this winter, that it will be a time where God will show us a little more of what is in store for our relationship.
- **For my relationship to God.** Even though I am technically an overseas missionary, I still feel like Joe Whipple from Palmer AK. A kid who while in the midst of his mistakes and failures, searches to understand and know his God better and to figure out how in the world to live his life in the conscious knowledge that he is the beloved son of The Holy God. Needless to say, this Joseph still has lots of questions, doubts, and confusions. But he is pretty sure that if this Holy God is who He says He is, then everything is under control and all will become clear in His timing.

Thank you for taking the time to read, and for your interest in my life.

Grace and peace,

Joseph Whipple

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