

NEWS FROM UTAH

AIM class of 2011

May-June

Salt Lake City

Hello hello!
I apologize for this newsletter being so late. I realize I missed the month of May, so this newsletter may be pretty long because it

covers two months, instead of just one. The work here is going very well. We have spent the majority of our time outside because the weather has been nice. Though each day is in the 90's or even in the hundreds, its been nice.

Catching up....

In my last newsletter, I had talked about an upcoming trip to Romania to see my biological family that I hadn't seen for at least 12 years. I imagine you're all wondering how the trip went and how I'm doing now that I've met my biological family. Well, let me tell you ☺

I'm not sure where to start, the beginning would be the ideal place to start, but I don't know where the beginning is. A little background history might be helpful, though. I, along with 3 of my other siblings, were adopted from Romania in 2001. We didn't keep in contact with our family there, in fact, they were almost forgotten about. In January of 2011, we made contact through Facebook and started talking again. After my sister, Maria, went to visit Romania, she told me how sick our mother is and how welcomed she was. There's no way to know how much time someone has left to live, I knew I'd regret it if I'd never met my biological mother. I wasn't fully prepared to meet everyone again and to see where I'd spent the first 8 years of my life, but I do not regret it.

I left Salt Lake City Wednesday, May 8th. After about a day of flying, I finally landed in the capital of Romania where I was met by Maria and two of my brothers. Maria had just finished her AIM time in Africa and met me in Romania before she flew back to the states. From the airport, we took a taxi to the train station where we waited for two hours for the train. The train ride to the train station closest to our village took about 7 hours, after that, it was another hour of riding in a car to get to the village. We finally made it to the house at 5 in the morning Friday. My mother had been waiting for us outside, I don't know how long she had been waiting. While on the train, she'd call every hour to see how close we were. She had stayed awake the previous night cooking traditional Romanian food and sweets. She greeted us both with the traditional kiss on each cheek and then invited us inside where a big breakfast was waiting for us. It was a bit awkward because they didn't eat, they just stood or sat and watched us eat. While we ate, our other brothers and sisters were waking up and getting ready for the day. They would see us and come hug and kiss us and then say something in Romanian. My little sisters, who I'd never met, hugged me and held on to me. They craved affection so much and had finally found family members that wanted to cuddle with them. Out of excitement and nervousness, I had not slept at all on the airplane or the train ride, I'm glad we were able to sleep for a few hours.

The first few days were fantastic, I was taking in the culture and getting to know my family better. It was all so exciting! The excitement never wore off, but now I started to pay more attention to the living conditions and the different culture.



This is our house and where we stayed at. This house is fairly new, it has taken 6 years to get this far and only a few of the rooms are finished. There is a small house next to it where everyone lived in before, it has only 3 rooms. Somehow, 10 children and two adults fit in there. The big house has some electricity.



This is my mother, Lidia. She is 49 years old and has mothered 13 kids, the oldest is 32. She was married to my father until he passed away, she married a great man a few years later. She is very shy, but has a great fear of God. It doesn't seem like she understands that God also loves and can be loved in return. She's a sweet woman.

On the left, is the majority of my biological family, minus two older sisters and my little brothers Nistor and George. Starting from the far left, we have Dan. He and Ioan, the boy on the other side of Maria are twins, they are 26 years old. Next to Ioan and in the white shorts is Petru, he is 24 years old. And next to him is my stepfather Ioan, he is the father of the small girls. Ioan is about 62 years old. In the red sweater is my half sister Nelly (named after my brother George), she is 10 years old. And the girl holding the hat is my other half sister, Mariuta (named after my sister Maria) and she is 7 years old. Last but not least, in the dark blue jeans is my brother Nicolae (Nicu is what we call him, he is named after my father) and he is 22 years old. None of my brothers are married or have children. They all live at home and provide for my mother and sisters. Only two have finished school, that is very common in this village.



Every day, we would walk around the village or to town, to meet friends of the family or other family members. The majority of my extended family live in the same village. The villagers there had most likely never met another American, besides my sister, so we would get stared at whenever we walked places. Romania is very green with much farm land, we would be walking and when the people farming saw us, they'd stop what they were doing and watch us. There were very few cars, they are very expensive, most people walk everywhere. It was very neat to walk somewhere and have people remember us from when we were younger. All the older people remembered us and became teary eyed or cried, they'd hug and kiss us, and then invite us in for sweets and juice. Maria and I sat and ate while one of my brother's shared our story.

There were big families there, I met a lady who had 7 children, she was only 33 or 34 years old. My oldest sister is I think 32 and has 5 children. I saw a big difference between American kids and Romanian kids. American kids expect to be shown affection and their parents are expected to give them affection. The children in Romania are not shown affection, most are taken care of, but the parents do not show them affection. I saw this with my little sisters, my mother and their father wasn't affectionate at all, so they were not used to it. I think it scared them at first to see how affectionate Maria and I were to them. We saw that all the children crave it, but the culture there isn't affectionate. I was able to play with some of the kids from the village, they mostly laughed at me because my Romanian is terrible, but they loved that I'd hold their hands or even just listen to them. I taught them to play volleyball, once other kids saw my little sisters and I playing, other kids quickly came to watch and then play.

I went to church one Sunday with my mother, she is Pentecostal. Pentecostal's there are very different than Pentecostal's here. There, being Pentecostal or claiming to be Christian means that you (assuming you are a woman) wear a head covering at all times, do not drink alcohol, wear only skirts or dresses, and do not wear make up or pierce your ears. My mother is a very devout Pentecostal. I had no idea what I was agreeing to when I said I wanted to go to church. We step in, and all the women are sitting on one side, while the men sit on the other side. A man walks up to the front and speaks for about 15 minutes, then ends in a prayer. Not the common kind of praying that we're used to. Whenever someone prays, everyone gets down on their knees and prays at the same time, out loud. The women would start crying, but still pray out loud. After what felt like 15 minutes, everyone got to the end of their prayers and the speaker up front prayed for another 5 minutes. This happened about 4 times. Once in a while, a verse would be quoted and I could follow along in my English Bible. I don't know about anyone else, but my knees hurt afterwards!

The food was great! It was all homemade and natural. The older people seemed disgusted by the thought of processed food. I brought Jello for them to try and some American candies, they wouldn't eat the Jello after learning it wasn't natural. One night, one of my brother's asked if we could make some traditional American food...

Overall, it was a great trip, though not long enough. I'm glad I had the opportunity to go and that everything went so well.

Other than that, we had two more AIMers come at the end of May. Two guys, both from Texas. Their main focus is the youth group here, and they're doing great! We're all grateful to have more help!

One of my ministries here is teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to a sweet lady from Afghanistan. After about 8 months of teaching, she will take a test at the end of the month to become a U.S. citizen. I don't doubt that she'll pass. Though she is very nervous, she's also excited to be one step closer to becoming a citizen.

Another one of my ministries is visiting the Temple here and befriending the girl missionaries there. The first month of being in Utah, I met a girl from the Marshall Islands and have grown to be good friends with her. Between letters and phone calls, our friendship has grown. Now, her mission is only 18 months, that means that this month is her last month and then she can go back home. Please keep her in your prayers, her name is Shana.

What God has been teaching me....

God has been teaching me what it means to trust him fully. I see this in situations that seem impossible or hopeless. Its encouraged me to give more and more over to God. And let him keep it! That's been the true challenge. Something that ties in to trusting God fully, is talking to him constantly. Through prayer, through meditation and other ways of spending time with him. The way I view spending time with God has been challenged recently, I am finding different ways to spend time with him besides prayer. Whether its writing him letters, being silent and listening to worship songs, singing, reading his words, etc. Its exciting to learn there is more than one way to spend time with him. Praying has been the most common way I spend time with God. I realized that it makes a difference to pray sitting down or in a chair compared to kneeling. First of all, its uncomfortable to kneel. I am reminded when I kneel who God is and that I am a servant.

I love that there's always more to learn, always something else about God to surprise me.

Prayers....

I ask that you continue to pray for the youth here. For their spiritual health, and that they will continue to grow. The church here also need your continued prayers. Let's make this easier, please pray for all of Utah. Especially Salt Lake City.

This month in particular, I am struggling with being patient and loving unconditionally. I am faced with a situation where God is commanding me to continue loving no matter what mistakes a person continues to make. I tell you, it is so hard. My heart and emotions tell me to focus on other people that are seeking for God, but God keeps telling me to keep loving. Please pray for me to continue to follow God and to let him lead.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement so far, they're both appreciated more than I can explain ☺

With much love,

Beta Katkus

P.S. As always, if you have any questions or would like more information about something specific, please feel free to reach me through email or at my number (907 841 0078).