

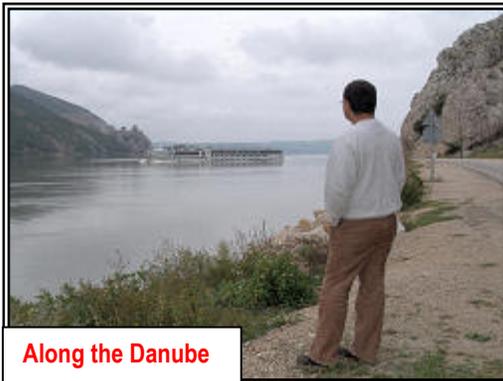
Recollections of Romania (2005) – Part 5

Ed Rozyłowicz, Las Cruces, NM, USA

Wednesday ... we fill up the Nissan in town (\$4.50 per gallon). We take the Danube River road all the way to **Bazias**, which is the last Romanian village on the Danube before the Danube River turns west into Serbia. Again, the road is hard, rutted and unmaintained. By now everything is familiar to us up to Moldova Veche. Along the way, and for a change Laurentiu was talkative while driving, we got a better glimpse into Romanian life during the Communist era and during the dictatorship. For example, we learned:

- ... In his youth, Laurentiu had to stand 8 hours in line until the chicken truck arrived. No truck – no chicken.
- ... It was common to stand 24 hours in line to receive your allotment of propane gas (for cooking);
- ... Rationing was pervasive ... little income, even less to purchase;
- ... Grandmother Vasilica walked 8 km (5 miles) out of town to pick up scat (cow dung) (for heating);
- ... Father Romeo was on waiting list 21 years for a home telephone line;
- ... Danube Iron Gates area was “off-limits” to all except local farmers. Explains the lack of road maintenance;
- ... There were 24 border checkpoints from Iron gates to Czech border;
- ... Gasoline was rationed to 24 liters per month per family (6 gallons a month – if you could afford a car)
- ... The reason the Danube Road is so bad is because when the dam was built in the ‘70s, the original road was flooded and the new road up the cliffs was hastily constructed without a proper base. There is no money today to build a better road unless the tourist industry warrants it.

Stopped for coffee outside Bazias ... the most friendly of mongrels entertained us at the coffee shop. This is the place where the Danube River enters Romania. We bid goodbye to our “Blue Danube” (actually brown) and head north to **Timișoara** by way of backcountry roads. At Village of **Socol** we had no choice ... turn right and stay in Romania or keep going straight and you will wind up in Serbia. We turn right ... and take a most interesting back road.



Along the Danube



Road traffic



“Banat Style” village



Cow tender

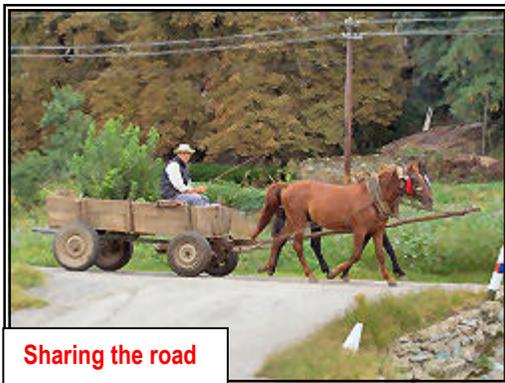
With Serbia literally a mile to our left we navigate this primitive dirt road through **Campia**, **Pârneaura**, **Zlatița** and **Lescovița** before emerging on highway 57 to Timoșoara. This route showed us the real Romania ... agricultural. Primarily cornfields, this landscape was rich and productive.



Banat colors

Encountering horse-drawn carts we slowly dive in and out of these villages with the typical **Banat** country architecture ... fronts of homes are almost windowless (shuttered where there are windows) and wide and tall wooden gates leading to an interior courtyard typically filled with farm animals and their feed. None of the road was paved except for a small stretch usually in the middle of the village.

Few shops, no cinemas, no post offices; maybe a few official governmental buildings but always a school. Took an hour to traverse 12 miles but it appeared as if we traveled in a time warp. By the time we hit highway 57 the landscape was entirely flat with the **Dogneci Mountains** in the distance to the east.



Sharing the road

The drive to Timoșoara was uneventful but filled with some trepidation as we encountered heavy truck traffic and increasing industry. The landscape was changing between apple orchards and cornfields. The rain continued but had little effect on our pace.

Six and a half hours after leaving Orsova we are at the outskirts of Timoșoara. Normally a four-hour drive ... our drive was longer because of the scenic route we took.

From the distance we see power plants and smoke stacks. Timoșoara is a large city ... a gateway city to Serbia and Hungary ... a border town. We find city center and it is a mad scramble.



Entering Timișoara

Traffic is rush hour heavy. Laurentiu seems to know where he is heading and we sidestep circling roads before arriving at the center of town, with its large plaza, and our **Timoșoara Hotel** just steps away.

We check the rates at the hotels (52 euros double; 47 euros single) and get our rooms ... includes breakfast. Settling in and with daylight left we leave the hotel for our exploratory walk. **Victoria Plaza** of Timoșoara is spacious and orderly.

On one end is the **Opera House** and on the other end is the **Metropolitan Orthodox Cathedral**. In between, the plaza is decorated with a massive garden with intricate floral displays ... in vivid fall colors. Park benches line each side and topiaries

serve as backrests. Large buildings of the Austro-Hungarian architectural style border the plaza and their lower shops offer a variety of goods ... mainly modern and costly.

A few restaurants are included but mainly the plaza is a walker's dream. Laurentiu points out some vestiges of the **Romanian Revolution of 1989** that started in Timoșoara, lasted 4 days, and ended in Bucharest. Visible still were bullet and mortar holes in some buildings. Fifty people died in the revolution here.

Although it is overcast and the air is humid, people are congregating in this plaza. "Aida" is playing at the Opera House and the throng of people is anticipating its performance. We walk the few blocks to the Cathedral and spend time exploring its interior. It is a massive complex and the heart of the city. Of course, we light candles here as well. Unfolding our umbrellas against the light rain we take a stroll through the nearby park and take a circuitous route through some residential streets before emerging on a boulevard that would take us back to the plaza.

We cross the **Bega Canal** that bisects the city and marvel at the many canal-side attractions. Virtually everything within a stone's throw of the Victoria Plaza is architecturally beautiful with reminders of how things were in the late 1800s. Sadly, almost all of these structures showed the ravages of time and neglect. Peeling stucco, rotted doors and

windows, roof tiles missing, steps disintegrating and the typical garden or front yard overgrown and forgotten. There is a lot of possibility here if only money and interest was applied. The passing trams, colorfully painted, full of passengers harkens to the old days. Timișoara is a beautiful city.



“Metropolitan”



Opera House

The rain intensifies and we head back to Victoria Plaza ... looking for a place to have supper. We settle for “**Lloyds**” just across the plaza from the Opera House. We settle into our outdoor tables under a canopy and order our supper: goulash soup, goulash and potatoes, chicken and polenta, pork knuckle with beans and salads. Beer complements our meal. The rain becomes torrential but we are warmly seated eating as fast as we can chew, as the meals are getting cold. By the time I finish my papanasi it was getting dark. We scramble back into the plaza and make an obligatory evening walk of the commercial center.

We decide to walk to **Piata Unirii** (Unity Plaza) to view some truly medieval architecture. We pass discos, Irish pubs, small restaurants and a host of modern but garish stores when we get to Unity Plaza. Even at night we can make out the fabulous architecture of the four churches ringing the plaza and the medieval former residences of the aristocracy. All of the open-air, canopies covered drinking establishments are devoid of customers. It is cold. We amble about for some time before our feet remind us that the hour is late ... we head back to the hotel.



Rainy evening in Timișoara



Piata Unirii

Sleep, in this 3*** hotel and on the 7th floor, is hard to come by. Although recently renovated the windows in our room did not close properly and we could hear the din of the street traffic. That combined with the spotlights that illuminated the hotel and shone in our window made matters worse. Had to retrieve the earplugs again.

In the morning, groggy and half-asleep I counted 7 churches as seen from my hotel room. The day started foggy. After a usual breakfast of everyday items the three of us decide to explore the nearby neighborhoods and try our hand at Unity Square again. Some of the things I learned on this walk ... the first street light in Romania was erected in Timișoara and the first tramline in Romania were built in Timișoara. We stopped to exchange USD for leus (2.85 leus to \$1 USD). Did some gift shopping when Laurentiu recommended that we drive to **Town of Arad**, only 35 miles north of Timișoara.

One hour later we are parking the Nissan near the city center of **Arad**. Laurentiu is disoriented so he hunts a place to buy a map. No luck. We make our way to the city center and walk the main promenade. It is midday and the throngs of people tell us that no one is working. We settle down on a bench outside City hall while Laurentiu tries again.

People watching is fun. One thing I noticed ... mobile phones are everywhere, mostly by young people. And the other interesting thing about these contraptions is that people check their phones every two minutes to see if they missed a call. For every person actually talking on the phone there are 5 or 6 just playing with it or checking for messages. Must

be a new toy or love with technology. The three of us just walk and look ... keeping an eye out for the trams and wayward taxis.

We explore a Roman Catholic Church ... pop in a few stores ... admire the Austro-Hungarian architecture ... and walk the nearby residential area. Being mid-day I suggest that we stop for lunch ... we order two 4-cheese pizzas and beer and attack both with gusto. Should keep us satisfied until supper. Because Arad is somewhat similar to Timișoara we decide to head back to our hotel. Without elaboration we had to spend an extra hour in Arad as we had a mishap with the Nissan and it required a police report. By 5PM we were on our way and welcomed the sight of Timișoara an hour later.



Arad City Hall



Arad architecture

Looking for a decent restaurant tonight was iffy as many of the places did not appeal to us ... mostly drinking places. We chanced upon a 'restaurant' sign, **Casa cu Flori** (House of Flowers), that looked promising ... we walked inside ... not so promising ... but the waiter said the restaurant was up a flight of stairs. We walked up and were delighted to find a place that had tablecloths. We got a table as it was early and explored the surroundings. On the adjacent table was a group of "hens" (older ladies) that were just enjoying themselves silly. They all were smartly dressed, talked incessantly and laughed at every opportunity. It was refreshing to see and hear jovial people. Scanning our menus we ordered: schnitzel with potatoes, pork medallion with beans, chicken breast with mushrooms and croquettes and of course papanasi and crepes. Beer for us and wine for Dolores. The service was fast and complete ... excellent. The incoming clientele appeared well off and we were the only ones dressed as 'tourists'. Dinner for three ... 110 leus (about \$40) ... a bargain. Even Dolores commented that this was a nice experience and the food was excellent (a rare compliment).

Returning to our room we turned on the TV and tried to find an English channel ... no luck. Romanian TV concentrated their coverage on the flooding pervasive throughout southern Romania, including Bucharest. Bridges washed out, roads are like rivers, farmland under water and heavy loss of agricultural products and foodstuffs. There was some coverage of Hurricane Rita hitting Texas and Houston but the coverage was not in English. We thought our return flight to Houston next Tuesday would be cancelled or diverted. We had some concern but could do nothing about it. Visions of Texas under water filled my mind throughout the night as I tried to find some sleep.

Friday ... checked out ... credit card not accepted ... had to use cash. After breakfast we exchanged some more USD for leus, just on the chance that we would need cash in the next place. Went to a 'casa' and for \$300 USD received the usual complement of 500,000 and 100,000 notes but also a packet, ½-inch thick, of 50,000 notes. This was crazy ... had to carry a wad of bills that made my slacks lumpy. I don't know if the cashier was funny or devious. Left Timișoara for **Baile Herculane**, just 4-hours away, which is located north of Orsova the town we were just in a few days ago.



On the way to Herculane



On the way to Herculane

Baile Herculane is a 'spa' town and we will overnight there. The day is rainy and the roads congested ... traffic heading east is heavy with trucks. The roads are under repair due to flooding. Inhaling truck exhaust was again our constant companion. The mountains to our east were enticing, as we would be returning to a landscape more interesting than farmland. On the way to Herculane we pass apple orchards that stretch to the horizon. Vendors selling their produce every 100 yards for miles. These folks also turn these apples into a variety of **Tzuica** ... a little stronger but still authentic. We stop and buy a 20-ounce pop-bottle full of Tzuica for 80,000 leu (\$2.50). We pass on the apples, as they are not the store-bought, worm-free variety. By the time we hit the town of **Caransebeș**, the weather improves and the sun comes out. The remaining drive to Baile Herculane is on roads that wind through mountains and valleys. We arrive at the spa town by 3PM and begin our search for accommodations.



Baile Herculane

Baile Herculane (The Herculean Spa) ... the thermal and mineral waters from this spa were discovered and exploited by the soldiers of the Roman legions who conquered ancient Dacia. Because of the curative properties of the waters, the Romans named this place "**Ad aquas Herculi Sacras**".

The resort had been extremely prosperous in the 19th century, in the time of the Austro-Hungarian empire's occupation, when it had become a fashionable spa frequently visited by the emperor Franz Joseph and queen Elisabeth, who each possessed one pavilion in the resort. Situated in a mountainous area, the spa is situated in the valley of the river **Cerna**, in between high calcareous walls, 11 miles away from Orsova on

the Danube. The spa is a railway station for all the express trains following the route Bucharest - Timișoara. The climate is very mild, with sub-Mediterranean influences, without strong winds and low continental temperatures (both during summer and wintertime). Altitude is 160 m. The area is rich in thermal-mineral waters with big concentration of minerals recommended in external and internal treatments.

The entire Baile Herculane is privately owned but designated a historic site. The baths, pavilions and springs are derelict and appear abandoned. Many of the buildings are luxurious in appearance and construction but have been untouched for generations. The government is thinking about taking over this site and turning it back to a luxurious resort.

The drive through the complex was interesting in that the landscape changed from simple peasant homes to multi-story apartment buildings to mega-structures 20-stories tall high up the valley. We find a suitable hotel up the valley, a 2** with a good rate, but it is of the communist-era and not recommended by Laurentiu. We swing around and return to the front of the village and try again. We find 3*** motel/hotel/spa with a good rate and excellent views of the valley but only one room is available. It is a Friday and a popular time for week-enders to enjoy the spas. We drive back up the valley and see another 3*** hotel ... the **Hotel Claudia**, high on a hill. We check availability and rooms are available. We choose an apartment for 1,800,000 leus (\$64) that can accommodate the three of us (after all, we are family). Settling in, we survey the views from our balcony and indeed the sight is impressive ... the entire valley lays below us with the high-rises just to our right and to the back.

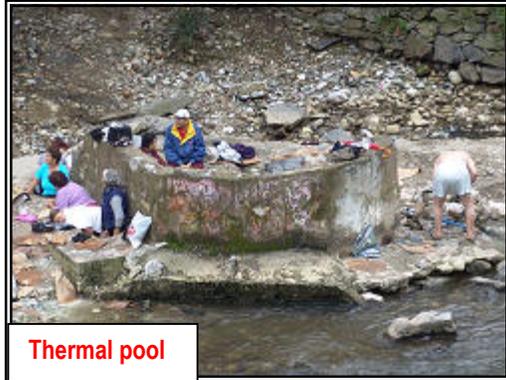
Daylight still ample, we hop in the Nissan and head north into the **Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park** that adjoins Herculane. We follow the **Cerne River** upstream ... catch a glimpse of the **Cerne Dam** and stop at a couple of overlooks. The clouds are rolling in and the mood is grey. We return to Herculane, park the Nissan and walk the bath areas.



The Roman Baths area

These 1800s spa buildings are truly amazing ... their architecture is Roman in appearance with moldings and frescoes that depict Roman life. One could almost imagine the luxury these buildings emanated when they were in their prime. Some of the old hotels still evoke decadence. We visit an open church. Not sure if it's still active.

We stroll past thermal-springs that are enclosed in some of these buildings ... the stench of sulfur is everywhere. We peek at the Cerne River that cuts through Herculane and see dozens of springs that spill over the walls into the river ... the characteristic sulfur stain trailing the water.



Thermal pool

Some of the springs are super-hot, maybe 120 degrees Fahrenheit; some are cool and are channeled into water fountains that people can drink from. I was not about to try to taste any considering my gastronomic experience in Ukraine in 2004.

Many of the visitors were drinking the water some filling soda containers to take the water home. Looking over the river railing we spied a number of springs that were at river level and enclosed by stone walls ... these were bathing ponds where people may soak in or simply dip their aching body parts into. Again ... the overwhelming stench of sulfur.

We crossed the Cerne Bridge, hit a few souvenir stands and

detoured into some side streets. Passed the defunct University of Herculane (a diploma paper-mill) now shuttered and abandoned.



Hotel - shuttered

We drove to the Herculane train station to see the once elegant depot. "Once was" is an appropriate description. Still functional but showing its age the depot is busy with passengers coming and going (a train just pulled it – mostly second class compartments). The staircase leading up to the reception area was once a masterpiece ... today it is crumbling. Enough was enough and we knew it was supertime.

Restaurants are mostly closed – it is the end of the tourist season. We find a hotel with an open restaurant but the menu is so boring and uninteresting that Laurentiu recommends that we drive to Orsova and eat at our old hotel – The Meridian.

Orsova being only 11 miles away we get there in short order. The open-air dining room is closed but the tablecloth dining room upstairs is open. We are the only customers. We order the now-familiar fare: perch, chicken, salads, soup and papanasi with accompanying beer but no wine. The drive back to Orsova was in the dark. Took only 15 minutes. Stopped by an Internet shop and checked mail and sent a brief message. A horde of kids inside made our 15 minutes there a pain so we cut it short and headed back to the hotel. Watched a little TV, mainly of the Romanian flooding and hurricane Rita. By 9PM we crashed ... sleep was OK if it was not for the floodlight illuminating our room.



Baile Herculane in fog

Breakfast was not included in our room rate ... an extra 300,000 leu (\$11 for three). Packed our bags into the Nissan pointed the car down the hill and made our way out of Herculane. Morning was extremely foggy ... could barely see the valley. Because there was a continual threat of flooding in southern Romania we elected to drive through **Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park** and take a northerly route ... distance would be the same to Bucharest but time-wise a little longer.

This drive was very scenic if only limited by the visibility. Sheer cliffs enclosed the road and the Cerne River cut deep gorges to our left. Stopped by a lookout and the gorge was heart-stopping impressive.

Made our way up and up until we reached the 1,050-meter pass at **Godeanu**. From there it was downhill. We have not seen the sun but briefly since we left the Delta weeks ago. Along the way we encountered many examples of road and bridge damage caused by the flooding. Recovery, it seems, will be long in duration and costly.

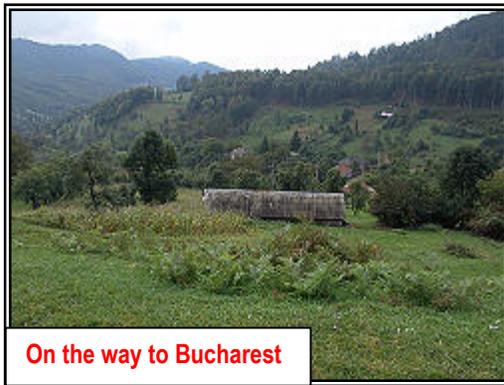
By early afternoon we entered the village of Horezu. First we decide to stop by a roadside stand to purchase some hand-made, hand-painted pottery this village is known for. The choices were many and the selections were of such high quality handiwork that it was difficult to choose. But, we had to consider transportation and the chance of breakage so we decided on small pieces. We purchased 18 pieces and the cost was embarrassingly low.



Monastery of Hurezi

While in the village Laurentiu recommended that we visit the nearby **Monastery of Hurezi**. The monastery was founded in 1690-1697 and is located in a picturesque setting. The centerpiece of the complex is the great Church filled with harmonious architecture and the iconostasis, carved in gilded wood. The exterior is frescoed with paintings the most unique being "The Ascension". Nearby stand two hermitages. Facing the church is another chapel and the **Tower of Dionisie**. Photography was not allowed in the church so we the opportunity to simply walk the church and admire its many elements. A nun overhead Dolores and provided an English interpretation which was appreciated. We walked the grounds and the courtyard observing and contemplating this spiritual

haven. The complex was not restored only preserved. We purchased the obligatory candles. The complex was filled with many tourists and perhaps worshipers. We spent 45 minutes here before we left for Bucharest.



On the way to Bucharest

Essentially our trip was over. We made our way to **Râmnicu Valcea** and **Pitești** where we picked up the A1 motorway to Bucharest. The A1 was excellent when we first picked it up but it deteriorated into ruts and potholes by the time we got to Bucharest. Laurentiu kept the Nissan at steady 120 km/hr (72+ mph). I was apprehensive of the speed as it was raining heavily all the way. Knowing the distance was only 60 miles I hoped for the best. While in transit we called Adrian Apartments and told them the previous apartment was unacceptable (I had a better word for it). We agreed to meet their representative at the old place to look at the newer digs. As we entered Bucharest by 5PM the rain subsided and Laurentiu announced that we covered 3,000+ kilometers (1,800+ miles) since the start of the

trip. By aching butt concurred. We made our way to city center and Unirii Square where we could not find any parking. Laurentiu had to drive around twice before we found something suitable but required that we walk a few blocks, dragging our luggage ... in a drizzle.

We met the representative and he showed us another apartment ... to me, similar and classified as a tenement flat. Having no choice we agreed to the same daily rate and sent him packing. We unloaded our luggage, without unpacking, and went back into the rain to pick up the Nissan and deliver it back to the University. It was 6PM and all of us were tired from a long day's drive. I recommended that we eat an early supper at **Teresa Doamnei**, our favorite restaurant. We walked the few blocks (the rain abated) and had our last restaurant meal in Romania: pork, lamb, chicken, salad, soups and... papanasi. After supper, we bid goodnight to Laurentiu, who was seen smiling as he walked away (thank God it's over, perhaps was going through his mind) as we headed to the market to buy some breakfast items. Returning to our apartment we crashed in short order but this place offered no sleep that night. Why ... this is a Saturday, the disco across the street is blasting music on outdoor speakers; nearby floodlights fill our room (no draperies); dogs are barking (in the hallway); and Dolores is happily wheezing and snorting. Earplugs are made ready.

Sunday ... Laurentiu has a commitment to conduct a test at the University. We have a free day to unwind and collect our wits and strength. We sleep late (or try to), have an ordinary breakfast of coffee and a sandwich and get dressed. By 10AM we're out the door for a stroll through city center. We purchase some books for family and friends, CDs for myself and try to take in an exhibition at the Art Museum. No luck ... line is a mile long so we abandon that idea and just stroll the by-now familiar neighborhoods. Early afternoon we return to the apartment where we pack and repack our suitcases to make sure all that we purchased would fit. The rest of the afternoon we watch TV and try to unwind.

At 4:30PM we meet Laurentiu at the University and we take a taxi back to cousin Aurelia's apartment for a last family supper while we are in Romania. We stop by the local **Billa** super-store to purchase wine, chocolates and some baking items. Next we stop by a flower stand to buy the traditional flowers for our hostess. Shortly we are Aurelia's and the evening's entertainment and dining begins. Laurentiu's mother (Ioana) is there also. Missing is his sister **Gheorghita**. No sooner do we get in than the table is set and the food keeps coming out. Preceded, of course, by brandy, wine and mineral water. This meal was considerably smaller than the first welcoming dinner but nonetheless large: antipasto, soup (tripe, that I passed on but Dolores ate), carp, chicken and fries followed by a sweet Romanian dish similar to Greek baklava. We exchanged additional gifts after dinner and cousin Aurelia really shocked us as she gave us seven,

count them 7, hand made macramé's. If ever you saw one of these table placemats they are exquisite and laborious to make. It takes an average of 3 weeks (fulltime) to 2 months (part time) to make a 12" macramé. A full one year to 2 years to make one that is an average of 3 feet in length and 2 feet wide. And we received seven of them ranging in length from 12" to 3 feet. I know that I asked at the last dinner where I could purchase some to take back home as gifts for family and friends ... but I did NOT expect her to dig into her own collection and present them to us. It was an awkward moment, for one cannot say "no" but at the same time this token of generosity humbled us. Such is the manner of hospitality of our European family.

Later in the evening Laurentiu, his mother and I discussed Romeo's passing last March. The subject of funerals and their associated costs came up again and I was immediately struck by a proposition that I had to make. I asked Ioana if she was receptive to our contributing something to the purchase and installation of a headstone for Romeo's grave. I knew the expense involved for I saw examples for sale in Orsova. With some hesitation Ioana accepted our proposition and I was happily relieved of the ½" stack of 50,000 notes. No more was mentioned of this, which was what we wanted. Dinner over and time to leave, would you believe it, I could not bend over to tie my shoelaces. That's how much we ate and drank over the past three weeks. We bid our last goodbyes to cousin Aurelia and Nicu and walked into the black night. It was black because there was a power outage. We could not see the path to the main road through the maze of apartment buildings and the many construction pits along the way. Luckily we survived, got top the main road and saw Ioana off (with her handbag full of money) to the tram. We hailed a taxi and made our way back to the apartment where Laurentiu said his goodnight and took the underground home. Sleep eluded us again that night ...damn the disco.

Monday ... last day in Romania. I asked Laurentiu if it was possible to visit the cemetery where Romeo is buried. We picked up the Nissan and headed southwest out of Bucharest. On the way Laurentiu detours and shows us the area where he grew up in. It is located on **Tirgiu Jiu Street**. It was once paved but has seen turned into a mud road after water and gas was brought in (roads never fixed). The original house is long gone, replaced by now dilapidating shacks. Chickens and pigs can be heard, for mainly poor folks and gypsies live here. They moved out in 1990 ... a year after the revolution. At **Bragadiru** we buy some flowers and candles and make our way to **Cornetu** where the cemetery is located. **St. Mikhail** is the church and cemetery. It is a new cemetery with old remains. The original cemetery lay some 2-kilometers west but a dam was built and a lake formed so the remains had to be moved 25 years ago. We park and enter the cemetery grounds ... it is a traditional Orthodox cemetery where the graves are mostly above ground and are capped with the Orthodox crosses. We locate Romeo's grave and linger in silent prayers for a few moments. Laurentiu tells us that the grave space costs 600,000 leus (\$20) a year. It must be maintained otherwise if it looks abandoned it may be 'recycled' by the church. He pays roughly 100,000 leus (\$4) every month to a local to pull the weeds and trim the graveside because the family lives some distance away. There is a metal railing surrounding the grave ... it is a family site. **Vasilica's** mother (Laurentiu's grandmother) is buried alongside. A metal and wooden cross top the grave ... both hand made by Nicu. The grave will be untouched for a year to allow the ground to settle ... afterwards Laurentiu plans to erect a small stone wall around it topped by a marble headstone we talked about earlier. Interestingly, family may reuse this "family site" as often as necessary. After 7 years, the remains may be unearthed, cleaned and deposited in an ossuary and placed over the next individual to be buried here. There is no limit to have many "remains" may be buried here. Concrete vaults are not used in Europe that's why this "recycling" is possible. We linger some more, say last minute prayers and leave St. Mikhail for Bucharest.

Laurentiu had a last-minute commitment to keep so **Steluța**, the young lady we met at the wedding agreed to show us around for a few hours. She is a 29-year old Ph.D. student at the University ... lives alone ... dumped her boyfriend of 7 years because he wanted to get married ... and loves to travel. I know how to get information out of people ... especially the pretty ones like her. We decide to do some shopping so we hop in a taxi and head for **CarreFour** (Car-4) a mega-shopping store ... bigger than our Wal-Mart. I would think that there would be more lookers than shoppers but people here were in a buying frenzy. I purchased a shoulder bag for my cameras. We then walked across to another mega-store (sort of a Home Depot with electronics upstairs) ... for no other reason than curiosity. Looking for more souvenirs to buy we took another taxi back to the Unirii Square shopping mall where, with Steluța's help, we managed to buy some much-needed items. Then it was time to walk back to the University to meet Laurentiu. Rather than say goodbye to our pretty guide we invited Laurentiu and Steluța to a 'last supper' at ... Teresa Doamnei. We had a last opportunity to savor some ciorba, sarmale and papanasi. Dining over we escorted Laurentiu and Steluța a way before we headed back to the apartment. We had to get up at 3:15AM to catch a taxi to Otopeni Airport and our return journey to Las Cruces.

Our summary ...

We achieved everything we wanted to achieve ... met with family ... attended a wedding ... did some magical eco-touring. Spending three weeks in an atmosphere of joy and adventure was worth the expense and tiredness. It is uncertain if we can return to Romania again ... with age and health always being a concern. However, there is one corner of Romania still on our wish list ... Muramures.

On reflecting back ...

On my first trip to Romania (2001) I dwelled on the grime and decay that I encountered, especially in Bucharest but frankly countrywide. I was shocked if not disappointed. Nothing in my personal experience matched what I saw (I was much too young when I left Europe in 1949).

On my second trip to Romania (2002) I accepted the conditions that I now knew were the remnants of the dictatorship era. I concentrated more on the people ... the peasant class, the middle class and the privileged. I spent my time trying to understand the people, how they lived off the land, struggled to survive the changing national economy and how they coped with modern society. I also studied more closely the historical changes that brought them into the 21st century. Knowing the people you begin to know the country.

On this 2005 to Romania I made it a point not to view the infrastructure of Romania in a judgmental way. Time and ascension into the EU will force changes. Bucharest, as well as it's sister cities in the interior, will accommodate this change, welcome foreign visitors and investors. Likewise I tried not to look at the people I encountered in any other way than just ordinary folks striving for survival and security. What I did want to do on this trip is catch people in their daily activities and see how they act or interact with each other. In essence I was **People Watching** for the sake of watching. I wanted to see normal daily activities ... things like ...

- ... Catching fish on the Delta using simple nets and bait in a boat ready to sink;
- ... Manning a watermelon stand but sleeping nearby because there were no customers on the road;
- ... Hanging laundry on a high-rise building;
- ... Washing and scrubbing a large carpet on a park bench;
- ... Washing clothes in a river;
- ... Dancing the **Horă**, the Romanian round dance;
- ... How Romanians on the street will not look you in the face directly (especially the older ones);
- ... How horse-drawn carts always carry people that look contented and not in a hurry;
- ... How worshipers in a church, young or old, look as if they want to be there;
- ... How men in the country apparently only shave for a Sunday;
- ... Old ladies, carrying a shopping bag or bundles of wood, walking miles between villages;
- ... How, in the country, one out of every five people is surely carrying an armful of bread;
- ... An old man or woman standing guard over a lone cow by the roadside;
- ... How a friendly smile is returned with a tooth-gapped grin.

That's the Romania I remember the most ... the friendly people, the beautiful landscapes and the Dacian history.

Ed Rozyłowicz
Las Cruces, NM USA