



**Sweet Bukovina!** ... As we traversed and criss-crossed the Carpathian Mountains between monasteries we became acutely aware that this land is called "Sweet Bukovina" for a reason. It is a wondrous and spell-binding country ... narrow well-maintained roads, high country meadows, vistas galore, flocks of animals of sheep and dairy cows everywhere, summer homes of log and mud and straw roofs dotting the hillsides separated by split-log fences (left and right). The green of the pastures in the early morning light can best be described as magical ... emerald green and smooth



as a tabletop. Crossing the high mountain passes we are continually awed by what greets us over each rise. Forested hillsides that kiss the blue sky ... rivers and streams that glitter as they reflect the sun ... horse drawn carts (right) carrying their loads of logs, rocks, corn stalks or newly mowed alfalfa, slowly but deliberately, down to the valleys. Like a scene out of the "Sound of Music", these visions spread out before us for dozens of kilometers before we descended to the lower elevations of Bistrita and Reghin and the foothills of the western slopes of the Carpathians. How sad, we said to Laurentiu, that the visions in our rear-view mirror couldn't carry us farther South.



Before long we are plying the agricultural flatlands towards Targu Mures and reach the city by 6PM. Targu Mures is old and derelict ... an industrial city that we fortunately passed through in rapid order. How can anything impress us after we have seen "Sweet Bukovina"? Turning right to go West, we travel 30 kilometers down a road that at times was being newly paved to sections that have seen better days. At the sign to Tamaveni we turn South. The road is terrible but deserted. We drive the 16 kilometers and eventually reach a rise that, once breached, revealed ... Tamaveni, nestled in a low valley. It is now approaching 8PM and any hope of locating the Morar Clinic soon fades as we enter the City Center and look for a tourist hotel. We are directed to a hotel high atop a ridge and eventually locate it. The parking lot is full (a good sign) and a party is in full swing in the ballroom for it is Saturday night. The hotel looks aged but is cheap ... \$10 USD for two. We check in, get the keys, find our room and ... gasp, what a hole! No turning back now, we shake our heads in disbelief, agree to spend a night here and leave to find a place to eat. Returning to City Center, we find a busy place that serves "food". It is an open-air café that is frequented by people of all ages. The dinner is OK and is cheap, \$5 USD for two including beer. Returning to the "hotel" with its party still going strong, we drag our luggage to the second floor and try to settle in for the night. First problem ... we cannot lock the door from the inside. It is warped and the latch does not line up. Try as we may, we cannot lock it. Laurentiu says to place our luggage on the floor to block the door. Good grief ... no! Eventually he kicks the door and the latch sets. We are safe ... but from what? Second problem ... the toilet. Flushing the toilet results in water gushing out of the broken rusty pipe and washing your shoes in the process. We are no longer shocked ... we are amused and take a picture of this "geyser". Third problem ... the beds are rickety ... the sheets are reasonably clean and there is one towel for the two of us. The Trei-Brei – best hotel in Tamaveni. The party below continues until 11 PM ... a TV somewhere blasts until 3AM ... we eventually wake up to a foggy morning.



Hello ... where is everybody? Looking out the balcony window we are greeted by a sight that seems odd. Our car is the only one in the huge parking lot (left). Devoid of any life, we wonder, "Does this remind one of the Alfred Hitchcock film "Psycho"?" We hurry to clean up and leave ... no hot water (as usual). Neglecting to shave, we speed up our pace of departure only to find that no one is in the hotel ... totally empty, including the manager. Cannot leave until we pay our bill and retrieve the passports. Finally at 8:30AM he arrives ... we pay and rapidly leave down the fog-shrouded lane to the City Center. Having a faint idea of where the Morar Clinic is located we backtrack up the main road and finally identify it. The building appears deserted so we ask a neighbor across the street if this is the Clinic and he responds with a "yes" ... but the Morars are out of town on a holiday, in Hungary. So much for advanced planning. We leave our card, the photos we brought along of the McCulloughs of Arizona, a brief verbal message and whisk out of town.

By 9AM the fog is thinning as we head South towards Medias. For a Sunday morning the foot and animal traffic on the road is heavy ... must be market day or else everyone is going to church. One thing to be said for these Romanians ... they sure walk a lot. Virtually every road is strewn with pedestrians, young and old, burdened with a load or a bag ... walking to some far-off destination. This nation either has the best-fit citizens ... or ones extremely tired. More often than not these same people wave to be picked up as hitchhikers ... with success. Romanians are polite and accommodating to people who need a lift ... except us, we have no room in the car. We are reminded of seeing a well-dressed older lady, carrying a sack and a bag, walking forlornly on the shoulder of a deserted road ... to a destination that in retrospect was 4 – 5 kilometers away, for there was nothing in between. And some of us are unwilling to walk to the corner store? We move on to our next destination ... Sighisoara, that ancient German City.



Sighisoara is a city that Laurentiu likes and admires. The old City Center, with its clock tower (right) and the Church on the Hill, is reminiscent of medieval Germany. With narrow streets (left) and homes dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we drink in the old-time splendor and imagine life in the middle ages. From the high vantage points we survey Sighisoara below ... red tiled derelict rooftops, the stonewalled cottages and steep cobble-stoned streets. The city has yet to come to life so we wander unencumbered. Drop into a cyber-café to send off e-mail. We found a café open and stopped for breakfast. Having seen all that we wanted to see, and with noon approaching, we departed



Shigosoara for that distant city of Brasov. The 100+ kilometers we covered in good time as the roads were somewhat improved and traffic was light. Along the way we pass scores of small villages whose architectural styles of homes lining the main road is vastly different from what we have seen in the Bukovina region. These structures are of the typical Transylvanian German style with the solid front of the house facing the street and high and wide double wood doors leading to the side and rear courtyards. Unlike Bukovina, with ample front gardens and their decorative well houses, the Transylvanian homes are stark and unimaginative, cold and uninviting. It was a rare sight to see a tree or any vegetation in front of a Transylvanian home. The farther South one drove the "sweet Bukovina" architecture of Northern Romania seemed as magical. But soon we were in Brasov ... and time to fill up the ARO. We pulled into a modern station ... Laurentiu filled up the tank while we used the "bushes". Hopping into the car to continue ... we could not. THE CAR WOULD NOT START!

Laurentiu, our master mechanic, was at a loss as what to do next. Try as we might, the engine would crank but not start. This called for an action plan. The ARO always carries spare parts so we pop the hood, survey the options and elect to give it a tune-up, right at the station. With minimal tools we change the plugs and points ... in the process losing a small spring which spelled disaster. With no other tools, we could not gap the points or set the timing. The engine still would sputter and refuse to come to life. We needed a mechanic ... and this was a Sunday afternoon. Again Laurentiu, at our prodding, corralled two likely looking men at the pumps and invited them to try to solve our problem. They agreed ... so we pushed the ARO into the nearby shade and set the men loose. Fifteen minutes later the engine was purring like a kitten ... we were \$10 USD lighter ... the two men richer ... and the prospect of reaching our next destination assured. But this old boy had reservations about the permanence of the repair ... the spring was missing and the points could jump loose and then what? We decided to bypass going to Bran Castle (Vlad the Impaler's) or meeting Laurentiu's lady friend Nadia (who lived in Brasov) ... and make our way to Bucharest. By now it was 4PM and this boy was getting edgy.

The road from Brasov to Ploiesti was closed for repairs. We had to detour West to Campulung and go over some mountains ... a daunting task considering the state of the ARO. No choice ... we point the ARO in that direction and off we go. No sooner do we reach Rasnov, 10 kilometers out of Brasov, then sign points that the road to Ploiesti is open at Predeal. The short cut over the Bucegi Mountains would shorten the trip but the mountain pass would be a challenge. Forming a convoy with other cars and trucks we shift into second gear and labor up the mountain ... 30 kph is SLOW ... the engine laboring and sputtering but we finally managed to make the crest and coast to Predeal. From there to Ploiesti are wall-to-wall cars and people ... it is a Sunday and the area is a mecca of sorts for recreation. Fighting congestion, traffic snarls, erratic drivers and pedestrians we manage to survive and reach Ploiesti and the main highway to Bucharest. By now the ARO was limping along, unable to keep up with the fastest traffic and essentially becoming a hazard on the road. By 6PM we reached the outskirts of Bucharest, passed by Otopeni Airport and made our way into the city. Cristi was supposed to meet us on the outskirts to drive us through the city but a call to his house revealed that he had two beers and was "unfit" to drive. It fell upon this man to complete the trip by braving Bucharest and all of its hazards. Our fears were unfounded, as the Sunday traffic was light, the roads open and pulling up in front of Gheorghita's flat was a relief. We stepped out of the car, kissed the hood of the car and the ground we walked on (in that order) and thanked the Lord for a successful and safe journey. Two weeks, two countries and nearly 2,000 kilometers ... we have made it!

**Home sweet home – Bucharest is!** ... Our return was anticipated and by 7PM we were sitting at the dining table enjoying another Romanian meal ... beer, wine, mineral water and the usual dinner fare. Bucharest was hot and stifling as compared to the countryside. This old man's body was sore from non-stop activities of the past two weeks and his well-developed arms and legs (from shifting and steering) told him that a needed rest was in order. We were dragging our proverbial fannies and before long another two pots of water were being heated on the stove (the hot water was still OFF). By 8:30PM we were flat on our back and begging the Lord to keep the dogs quiet (he did not listen). Sleep came easily.



**We cannot leave without seeing the best that Bucharest offers!** ... Early next morning, after another of Gheorghita's hearty breakfasts and sustained by an ample dose of home made wine, Laurentiu arrived and it's off to see the wonders of the city. Again, a taxi to the University ... time with the faculty giving them a run-down of our adventures ... and then it's off on a walking tour of City Center. Laurentiu is rightly proud of his city and his on-going narrative of every aspect of his hometown was intriguing ... especially anything to do with the revolution of 1989. The tour of "Curtea Veche" (left) or Palatul Voievodal, the underground palace, was delightful ... the many churches undergoing restoration was a good sign of the vitality of the city. The many museums, galleries and government building were impressive although, by luck, most were closed on Mondays. Still, we had a chance to enjoy their beautiful architecture ... especially the Roman Anthenum (right). Navigating our way to Parliament



Square we were impressed with what Ceausescu, the deposed and later executed dictator of Romania, did to redefine City Center. Although created at a great social and economic price to the nation, Parliament Square is the heart of the city and its broad avenues are reminiscent of Paris. Governmental offices are broad and impressive ... the fountains of the boulevard are resplendent by softening the



harshness of the monoliths framing both sides of the causeway. We ascend the rise to meet the Parliament Building (left) ... and it is BIG. The second largest building on the planet (in terms of land occupied) ... the largest is the Pentagon (of course). We walk around to the side entrance and secure tickets for a tour of this "Monument to Arrogance". Our guide speaks fluent English (her hobby) and we spend an hour walking the marbled hallways of this palace. Every twist and turn is of Romanian white or pink marble. The ceilings are immensivly high ... the carpeting rich and luxuriant. Nothing was done "on the cheap" in this place. Massive doors only Caesar would want. Meeting rooms resplendent in rich woods and large draped windows. The skylights are large and dirty for they are rarely cleaned (too dangerous). Matching double stairways of marble ... wide and kept clean by an army of staff whose sole purpose was to make this edifice gleam. And then we were ushered onto that balcony ... that sole

location from which the dictator of this nation addressed his subjects.

The panoramic vista (next page) was indeed breathless as one could imagine the hordes of people who stood before and beneath this balcony ... attentive to their leader's presence and dictates. One could feel the power emanating from this balcony but that feeling passed real soon as one realized the price the nation paid. We left the Parliament with a sense of awe to its splendor but despair to what is represented in the past. Leaving the Square we traversed the many small avenues and found our way to some small shops where more cultural CDs were purchased. We walked the park with its sizable lake and



glorious landscaping, past the Archive Museum, more government buildings and the Lazar High School. In such a short time we have seen enough to last us until we return ... to again rediscover Bucharest and its many jewels.

**Our last full day with family was a bittersweet one!** ... The last evening in Bucharest was spent with Gheorghita, Nicu and Laurentiu reconnecting on the lost intervening years. The life and times of Leo and Vasilica (his wife), the current and future state of Romania, the thrills, experiences and discoveries that were uncovered over the past two-week odyssey ... and sharing pictorial mementos. We gave Gheorghita some additional money for hosting us and giving up her room to this "American Rozyłowicz". She repaid in-kind by extending gifts to Dolores that included, among others, hand-made embroidered doilies, table-runners and a traditional shawl worn at Romanian weddings. For us, Nicu presented a male-shawl (as we can best describe it) that the best man at a Romanian wedding wears on his shoulder. The gifts were touching and appreciated. Laurentiu presented us with a book called "Sweet Bukovina" ... although it has a minor slant of Soviet propaganda (published in 1977); the pictorial essays are wonderful to read. We thanked them all for their generosity.

The following morning we packed for our return and took one long and unhurried walk around the neighborhood. Laurentiu and I talked about the many things that only newfound family members dare to bring up. Will the future see our return to Romania (very likely) ... the possibility of Laurentiu visiting America (not likely due to visa restrictions) ... and keeping in touch by email, cards and holiday greetings. We returned to the flat by 11AM ... Cristi was already waiting for us as the designated driver to the airport. Because of a last-minute change in plans, Romeo and Ioana went to the country to see her family during her one-week annual vacation. As such we did not have the opportunity to say our farewells to Ioana ... but Romeo did wish to see us off before our departure and would meet us at the airport.

Wishing Gheorghita and Nicu farewell was bittersweet ... while we were anxious to return home and our familiar surrounding, bed, and HOT WATER, we still were nostalgic as we shook hands and embraced for the last time during this trip. Packing the car and warning Cristi of the ARO idiosyncrasies, we maneuvered our way out of this block, met the heavy traffic of Bucharest proper and headed to Otopeni Airport. On the return leg the sights and sounds were not so ugly as we first encountered – for we were leaving having gained a better understanding of the daily struggles that the Romanians have to endure. We arrived at the airport at 1PM and, with our flight not departing until 4PM, managed to locate Romeo. The four of us went off to a distant café, ordered some beer and mineral water and embarked on a brief and also bittersweet re-visit. What more can be said in such a short time ... we talked about the past, the present and the future and what awaits us. Romeo again picked on his son Laurentiu regarding carrying on the Rozyłowicz name in Romania ... to the chagrin of Laurentiu. The time flew fast and we were anxious to pass Passport Control and Customs before departing. Again, with emotions running high, we shook hands with Laurentiu and Romeo, extended a warm embrace to both (and to Cristi) and entered Security. With one last glance backwards at two very important people in this man's life ... we turned and walked into the bowels of the terminal ... wondering – are we ever going to return to Romania and see our newfound family again?

