

Hosman, Christmas 2018

dear friends,

The boy's hand is spouting blood; half of his thumbnail has been torn off. Chopping firewood with an axe, the fourteen-year-old missed his target. His small siblings stand around him and laugh, his mother looks away helplessly. That was the first time I met Gheorghe, when he still lived with his family in a run-down hut. Not a day in his life had he spent in school, just like his mother and his twelve brothers and sisters. Who was his father? No one knew – there was a lot of coming and going in their house. After Gheorghe's accident with the axe, we wanted to take him to the doctor, but he refused. He picked up a dirty T-shirt off the floor and wiped the blood away again and again. Then he continued chopping: his mother needed the firewood in order to cook a few potatoes.

During the next six years we never were able to get the boy to attend school or to study. Only rarely did he come by the Social Centre. Sometimes he helped out with the Romanian farmers, but he couldn't get a job. No papers, no staying power. Once the police came looking for him, because his grandmother claimed he had stolen three hundred Euros from her chest drawer. I rather wondered to myself how that amount of money had even gotten into there. Then he had a colt which he wanted to raise and later use for his work with the farmers, but suddenly it disappeared again. Instead, Cristina had moved in, a young girl with two children. Now they all lived together in the room which had been too small anyway, with his mother, with his siblings. Gheorghe became a father for the two new children – and Cristina got pregnant.

Little Maia changed his life. Now he wanted to create a good home for his daughter. Gheorghe asked if he could come to our workshops. I had no great expectations, but renewed my offer to train in the carpentry shop. The next day he appeared punctually. The other apprentices, however, avoided him, complaining "He stinks and drinks". But Gheorghe got red dungarees and could shower in the Social Centre. He was interested and diligent, and soon developed into a reliable assistant.

Then, one evening, he stayed in the workshop until all his workmates had left. Andrei, the master carpenter, wondered why the boy stuck around so closely. "Andrei, I want to lead a normal life with my family. My little Maia should have a better home than I did. I can't let her live in that pigsty, there is too much noise and dirt and she mustn't fall ill. Could you get us a room?"

Thus began a search for a place to live. Together with Andrei, Gheorghe and the young craftsmen we fixed up an old house in Hosman. Gheorghe, Cristina and the three children got two rooms upstairs; on the ground floor we accommodated his workmate with his own young family. Gheorghe has become a good father. Cristina keeps the rooms clean, does the laundry and cooks. This autumn Gheorghe got a piglet which they keep in the little yard. It will still survive this Christmas.

Now the little princess Maia is radiant, comfortable on Gheorghe's arm. When I look at his hand, only the missing half thumbnail reminds me of his childhood. I hope he will daily continue converting wood into beds and closets in the workshop, for a good future for his children, and so that other families can get a home.

Dear friends, we are searching for a shelter for our young people. We have you to thank for many houses in which children may find warmth. Together we can shelter the Christ Child.

To you and your families, a blessed Christmas.

*Thank you for your confidence
Fr. Georg Sporschill SJ*

