

The C.O.P.I.I. Chronicle



Parachute game helps C.O.P.I.I. kids develop coordination and teamwork

2003 Camp Highlights

CAMP BY THE SEA: Thanks to help from our donors, C.O.P.I.I. was able to once again hold camp for 30 children from Beclean's Special School, a state-run orphanage in Romania. Camp 2003 was held in the lively resort town of Costinesti on Romania's Black Sea coast. Unlike the name suggests the Black Sea coast in characterized by white sand and crystal clear water. This was the first time at the seaside for many of the children, and mere words cannot describe their excitement when they first saw the waves and rolled in the soft warm sand. Art, music, and drama activities were held right on the beach, while some afternoon workshops were set up on the terrace of the Vila Coral hostel where we stayed. Staff at the Vila Coral took a shine to the kids from Beclean and even volunteered to help out in the workshops. On the beach, other kids joined in on some of our games. Our kids met playmates beyond the institutional walls, and people on the outside got to see how special they really are.



RHYTHM AND RASTA: Each summer, Costinesti comes to life with the pulse of student vacationers who pack into the town's many open air discos. The Beclean kids know all the words to their favorite hits, and loved hearing pop music come pouring out of dance clubs as we walked by. One afternoon, we took the kids to "make a disco" of their own. Dancing in the field near a discotheque, we imagined that the music was playing just for us. Thanks to volunteers Kristen Rogers and Becca Girard, we didn't have to just imagine it for long. Kristen and Becca asked a group of professional Reggae musicians from South Africa who were touring music venues in the area to play a set for our kids. Much to our surprise, the musicians known as The Dread Kings agreed to come to the C.O.P.I.I. camp and give us our own private concert! The Dread Kings played, sang, and even lead the kids in a conga line! Afterwards, they answered some of the kids' questions about South African culture, music, clothes and hairstyles.

NEW VOLUNTEERS: In addition to some new faces from the Beclean Special School staff, we also had a team of five new student camp counselors from high schools in the Beclean community. New C.O.P.I.I. volunteers Charlie Win and Oana Petringel directed a daily youth activity and discussion hour for the teen camp counselors. Charlie is an art therapist from Somerville, MA who specializes in working with youth-at-risk in the Boston area. Oana is a former high school teacher from Bistrita, Romania. She is also a founding member of the C.O.P.I.I. camp

project. Doug DeAngelis came along as our official camp photographer, organizing photo workshops for kids and teens. He also took the wonderful shots displayed in this newsletter. Kristen Rogers of Salem, MA came along to conduct movement workshops for the children. Kristen is a student at UMass specializing in early childhood education.

RETURNING VOLUNTEERS: We are very grateful that both Amy Oik and Becca Girard were able to return for C.O.P.I.I.'s second annual camp. Amy is continuing her video project with the help of film students Maria Savin and Sergiu Lupse who also returned to the camp from the university in Cluj, Romania.

-Kim Tompkins



Dread Kings jammin' at Camp C.O.P.I.I.

What Does C.O.P.I.I. Mean to a Romanian?

I love what C.O.P.I.I. is doing with the Romanian kids. I have been thinking that it is almost fashionable among Romanians to help these kids by offering everything except for emotional support. They can have food, clothes and toys but if nobody is working with them, it's in vain. What C.O.P.I.I. does for these kids helped me decide to come again this year and to participate and help next year, too. Art therapy is something wonderful and in Romania, we haven't had any such thing. I think that it is opening up new perspectives! This is very important because after each camp, the people from the camp and the teenagers tell others about what we've learned. This thing gives others new ideas for helping kids in this situation and more people want to get involved as volunteers.

In the camps I learned how to help, how to take care of and love these kids. It is fantastic to see the progress that they are making. I was very surprised to see kids that didn't talk last year speaking to me this year. Communicating with them through art, drawings, colored things helps the kids to learn to have an open mind and almost makes them forget where they come from. These ten days are a little piece of heaven for them.

-Maria Savin

IMPART Shares with Beclean Teachers

One of C.O.P.I.I.'s major goals is to introduce orphanage staff to new ways of working with the children through creative activities. Luckily, we are not the only organization in Romania with such an objective, and are glad to have joined forces with one of Romania's leading charitable organizations to help further our common cause.

In 1990, a conscientious group of Romanian expatriates in the United Kingdom formed the Relief Fund for Romania, an organization largely responsible for bringing international awareness to the plight of the children in Romanian state institutions. In 1998, an offshoot of the organization formed Fundatie de Sprijin Comunitar (The Community Support Foundation) to

address issues facing children and the elderly in state-run institutions in Bacau. Still primarily supported by the Relief Fund for Romania, the FSC set up the innovative IMPART team, a group of well trained Romanian therapists who use music, art and drama to treat the mental and emotional health of people living in Romania's institutions. The IMPART team consists of six roving therapists who go from one institution to another bringing the gift of creativity and compassion. Not only do they administer combined arts therapy to those in need, but also occupy themselves with the goal of training institution staff in the use of art therapy techniques.

In March of 2003, FSC and the IMPART team held a Romanian national conference in Bacau to further their mission of spreading the concept of art therapy throughout the country. C.O.P.I.I. was able to send two delegates from the Special School in Beclean to the conference, including Camelia Bulhac, the director of the orphanage. The Beclean reps attended workshops in arts as therapy, perception of disability, institutionalization in Romania, human rights, and the rights of children.

Five therapists from IMPART accompanied us this summer in Costinesti to lead daily activities for the children. On the beach, we used colorful billowing scarves in activities designed to soothe the mind and we practiced control and cooperation with parachute games. In addition to drama and craft activities, IMPART introduced the powerfully therapeutic tool of music. Creating and listening to music has a relaxing effect, reducing individual and interpersonal tension. These children who are so often shouting to be heard over the other's shouts, gradually learned to play their instruments one at a time or combine sounds to create a shared orchestration.

This year, C.O.P.I.I. will sponsor the IMPART team to conduct a four day intensive training course for Beclean orphanage staff in the use of combined arts therapy. At next summer's camp, some of the children's very own teachers will be trained to lead them in creative activities and will be prepared to continue the spirit of arts and healing year round.



Lenuta of IMPART leads music therapy

Trolls, Radishes, and Other Remedies

Drama and storytelling are among the most powerful confidence building activities at camp. Through role playing, kids get to tap into their imaginations with the characters they play. Also, for these children who spend most of their lives competing with at least sixty others for attention, getting to take center stage and be heard alone is of particular importance. On stage creativity is directly awarded by applause and praise from an audience of teachers, peers, and the camp counselors that they so look up to.

This summer, the children put on two plays. The first was a rendition of Little Red Riding Hood, a classic in Romania as well as in the U.S. Prior to the show, kids spent the afternoon building puppets for the play from paper and scraps of fabric. The show was a hit. Inspired by the children's enthusiasm for theater, Mr. (Domnul) Dan, one of the children's favorite teachers from the Beclean School who had himself been raised in a state orphanage, offered to write and direct a play called "The Radish and the Cow Patty." Dan is loved for his unstoppable sense of humor. Eleven-year-old Mihaela Karasi made a stunning debut as the Radish. Luckily no one had to play the Cow Patty.

As a fun twist on nightly entertainment a cast of teachers, teen counselors and U.S. volunteers surprised the kids with a play that they had secretly been rehearsing. The

play called *Uci, the troll (Uci Zmeu)*, written by Kim Tompkins, uses popular characters from Romanian folklore. "Saint Friday," (Sfantavineri) is a good witch connected to the benevolence of nature who appears in many Romanian folk tales. The troll-like "Zmeu" is a well-known bad guy. The story touches on themes of acceptance, rejection, self-love and friendship – issues common to these children in particular.

By putting the play on for the children, teachers and mentors got to work together to show the children a world where acceptance reigns. Most importantly, our audience was delighted just to see these otherwise serious grown-ups laughing and playing on stage just for them.

Following is the story of *Uci, the Troll*:

Once upon a time Saint Friday decided to take a vacation on the beach. She gathered up her beach toys, suntan lotion, and bathing suit and headed off towards the beach. Before she left, a little bird came and asked her where she was going. She said, "I'm tired of working so hard in all of these stories. I'm going on vacation to the seaside. I'll lay in the sun, go swimming and dance at the discos all night long. "Okay" said the bird. "Come fly with me to the seaside and I will join you."

No, thank you," said Saint Friday. "I am on vacation from magic. I'd like to take vacations like ordinary people do and find out how ordinary people live. I'll walk to the seaside like an ordinary person would."

But Saint Friday wasn't used to walking and she got lost. She came upon a village where she asked for directions. "Go away. We are busy," said a villager. "If you got lost, it's your problem not ours. She walked into a bakery. "Can you at least give me some bread, I'm hungry from walking for so long. "Get lost," said the baker. "We don't help each other here." "If you're hungry it's not our problem." Saint Friday became so angry that she decided to turn everyone in the village into a troll until they could learn to work together and be more helpful. Then, she flew off with her bird friend to the seaside.

Life in the village became very difficult for the trolls because they were afraid of one another. Every time they needed to do something, even as simple as buying food, they would see another troll and become so frightened that they would

run home, hide in their beds, and pull the blankets over their heads to hide. The baker troll couldn't sell his bread because he was afraid of all the trolls who came in the bakery and he would chase them all out of his store. It was the same story for the shepherd troll, the teacher trolls, the doctor trolls and the police trolls. No one in the village was happy and no one had any friends.



Now, near this village there lived a REAL troll whose name was Uci. Unlike the troll-people, Uci was a nice troll. He saw this new village of trolls and wanted to be friends with them. But every time he said "hello" to any of them, they would run away screaming "Help! Help! A troll" and would hide under their blankets in their beds. This made Uci so sad, and he walked away into the forest with a very heavy heart.

After walking and crying for a long time, he came to a lake that was so still that it looked like a mirror. Uci looked down into the water. Being that he didn't have a mirror at home, he had never seen his reflection before and thought that he was meeting a new troll.

"Hello" said Uci. The other troll also said hello. Uci smiled. The other troll smiled, too. "Don't be afraid!" said Uci. The other troll told Uci not to be afraid, too. "I like you," said Uci. "Let's be friends," he said, and the reflection agreed. Then Uci was very happy because

he found the most wonderful friend who was another nice troll and who wasn't afraid of him.

Then Saint Friday came down from the sky. "Uci, you are a special troll. You have learned a very important lesson - that you always have a friend in yourself. And now you can make friends with the others. I have brought three magic mirrors back from the seaside. Take them to the village where the others are still afraid of trolls. When they look in the mirrors they will not see themselves as trolls but as elements of the sea. They will see the vastness of the water, the warmth of the sun and the softness of the sand.

Uci did as he was told. When he got to the village the trolls looked in the mirrors. The baker said "Uci, look! I am as great and vast as the sea. I do not need to be afraid. Thank you for helping me to see this. Will you be my friend? You can have all the bread you want anytime."

Another troll said, "Look! I am as warm as the sun. I would like to make you my friend."

And still another said, "Mr. Uci, my heart is as soft as the sand. I can be a very good friend to anyone."

Uci was very happy with his friends in the village and all the villagers were nice to one another. Suddenly Saint Friday appeared before them, fresh from her seaside vacation with a beautiful suntan. She said, "I am in such a good mood after my vacation that I will turn you all back into people." And she did just that. Uci stayed a troll because that's what he was, and the people continued to be his friend forever. When Uci went home he passed his reflection in the lake and knew that he was his own very best friend of all. And that's the most important thing.

The End



Amy at the camera while Andrea looks on

Video Records Our Shining Stars

Many of us take it for granted that we have photos, artwork, diaries or other artifacts from childhood that remind us what we were like when we were very young. Without parents to document special events or put their best crayon drawings on the wall, most of the children from the Beclean Orphanage and Special School lack these kinds of keepsakes. One of the objectives of the COPII project is to create, and assist the children in creating, a small archive of personal and collective history. The video component of the COPII project has proven to be a fun and interesting way to do this, as well as to share some of these experiences with others.

During the 2002 COPII project, we discovered the children's unending passion for seeing and creating images of themselves. The photo and video cameras we brought were an instant hit. As the head of the video project, I had three main goals. The first was to use video as a way to facilitate interaction between the teenage volunteers and the younger children. After some basic training on the cameras, teenagers were asked to spend some time documenting the activities of each of the thirty children during the course of their day; talking to them individually or simply observing them. Nearly every evening, we gathered in front of the TV to watch the unedited, sometimes jiggly footage. Claudiu making a clay snake, Andreea running through the grass making bird sounds, Talida singing a song she made up, Marian painting a picture on a river rock: all these images provoked laughter and recognition. I expected them to tire after an hour or so of unedited video, but their enthusiasm always outlasted the tapes, and

the teenagers enjoyed seeing their work received with so much excitement.

The second goal of the video project was to have the younger children--ranging in age from 4 to 14--participate in making short movies of their own. I am very interested in the practice of what's called "participatory video," in which a trained media specialist collaborates with untrained filmmakers to make work that's important to the community. Participatory video is a rather general term for the use of video as a means of self-expression and empowerment in a variety of contexts. By participating in creating images of themselves and their world, people who have not traditionally been given a voice in the dominant media—or who have difficulty doing so because of disability, illiteracy, or age—have an opportunity to express themselves in an audiovisual medium.

One of the short movies, shot over two days with the participation of all 30 children, was based on a story written by 11-year-old Adelina whose mother is homeless. Adelina lives at the orphanage during the school year but stays with her mother during the summers. Because she is not a full-time resident of the orphanage, Adelina is allowed to keep her hair long while other girls from the orphanage have to crop their hair to prevent lice infestations. Adelina knew that the girls were sensitive about their short hair. "The King Who Wanted a Boy" tells the story of a queen who dresses her baby girl in boys' clothes to please her tyrannical husband, and what happens when the secret is finally revealed.



Video within the context of the COPII project is emerging as both a process and a product. As the children grow and the camp evolves, we will continue to gather footage and build on the video work done in 2002 and 2003. Interviews with teachers, camp participants, and several of the children who return to the camp each year, as well as verite-style footage from the orphanage and the camps, are the starting point for a longer documentary project about contemporary Romania.

-Amy Olk



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C.O.P.I.I. Project
 28 Turkey Shore Rd
 Ipswich, MA 01938
 (978) 312-1125
 (978) 312-1135 [fax]
<http://www.copiiproject.org>

Executive Director: Kim Tompkins
kim@copiiproject.org

