



Bedridden and frustrated: Confined to bed frequently and living in poverty, Alexandru often felt angry and defeated.

Alexandru Caruseru: THE BOY WHO LOVES BOOKS AND BIKES

by Adriana Henderson

Romania is a small country, but its problems are immense. Fifty years of communist dictatorship have left Romania in disastrous social and economic condition. Here, hemophilia is a matter of survival. Of the 1,800 registered people with hemophilia, most are infected with hepatitis B and C. This is a direct result of reusing needles, a widespread practice of the former communist regime.

As president of the S.T.A.R. Children Relief Organization, I have been involved with hemophilia in Romania for the past four years. Twice a year I crisscross the country, visiting large hospitals in major cities and small hospitals in towns and villages. I visit patients in their homes, no matter how remote.

Alexandru Caruseru is one of these patients. Alexandru is twelve, lives in a remote mountain village and doesn't attend school. There are no hemophilia treatment centers within 100 miles of his village. I met Alexandru for the first time last year. He and his brother and three sisters live in a one-room house containing two beds, a small table and a wood-burning stove. The bathroom is an outdoor wooden shack. When I arrived, I noticed that some porridge had been left on the stove from the day before—this was the children's everyday meal. Alexandru was bedridden, bored, sad and in pain. His father had abandoned the family and his mother was an alcoholic. When I asked Alexandru if he would like a toy, he surprised me by asking instead for books. I was confused. How could he read a book without knowing *how* to read? He recognized the letters, he told me. When I left him, I was in emotional pain myself. I worried about what Alexandru would eat the next day, and how he would spend the rest of his life. He was defeated, alone and hopeless.

When I returned to the US, I contacted Project SHARE to request factor for Alexandru. Project SHARE shipped the factor to Aurora, a local nurse who regularly arranges Alexandru's 100-mile trips to the nearest hospital qualified to administer factor. I kept in touch with Aurora for news of Alexandru's progress, and soon learned that he was pain-free and beginning to walk again. I eagerly looked forward to seeing Alexandru after his treatment. I wanted to see his miraculous improvement with my own eyes.

photos: Adriana Henderson

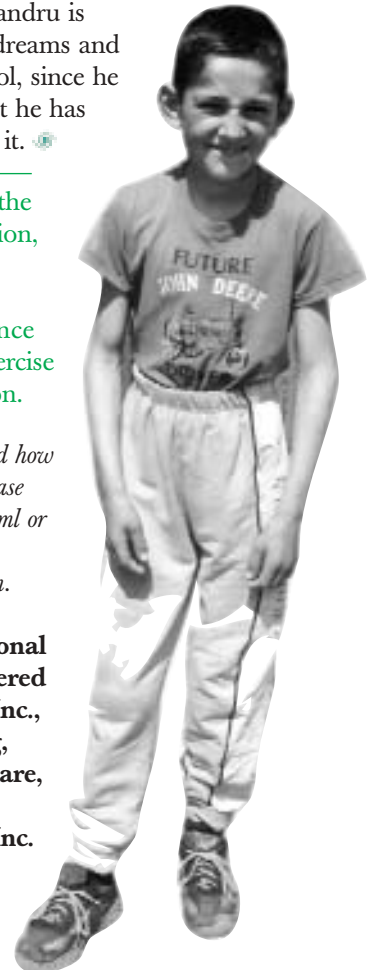
Six months after Alexandru's treatment began, I again made the trip to Romania and found a completely different child. As I drove into the village, I saw Alexandru playing in the street. He had a happy face and a big smile. I asked, could he run? He began running in circles, on and on without stopping. No, it didn't hurt, and no, he wasn't tired. He asked if he could have a bicycle. While shedding tears of happiness, I began to laugh. Alexandru had wished for books to read when he was bedridden; but now that he could run, he wanted to ride a bike. He didn't think about falling and getting hurt. He just wanted to be like the other kids—playing, running and riding.

Thanks to Project SHARE, Alexandru is happy and confident. He now has dreams and wishes. He still doesn't attend school, since he is far behind the other students. But he has taught himself to read and he loves it. 📖

Adriana Henderson is president of the S.T.A.R. Children Relief Organization, a California nonprofit that provides humanitarian relief to children in Romania. Project SHARE, in alliance with S.T.A.R., has purchased an exercise bicycle for Alexandru's rehabilitation.

To learn more about Project SHARE and how you can help patients like Alexandru, please visit www.kelleycom.com/iha/projshare.html or contact Director Annie Schwechheimer at 978) 352-7657 or annie@kelleycom.com.

Project SHARESM is an international humanitarian program administered by LA Kelley Communications, Inc., in partnership with ZLB Behring, Baxter BioScience, Bayer HealthCare, Hemophilia Health Services and Novo Nordisk Pharmaceuticals, Inc. Factor donations are primarily from private sources.



Hope regained: Thanks to Project SHARE, Alexandru is now playing, running and reading like other boys.