

# Fall/Winter Newsletter 2011 **One Heart Bulgaria** HOPE • LIFE • FUTURE *for Orphans*

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## One Heart Bulgaria: Internalizing love

This summer was a record-breaking year for One Heart Bulgaria's internship program with a total of 7 interns traveling to Bulgaria. One of the visions for the internship program is to have interns serving continuously for an extended amount of time so that the children can have on-going attention and benefit even more from our program. Thanks to the efforts of our Internship Director, Hollie Anderson, this summer for the first time interns worked in the Vidrare orphanage from June to August.

Interns serving in the orphanages help with an array of the children's needs. They help with projects in the orphanage such as painting and cleaning, and, most importantly, they help the children with schoolwork, play with handicapped children, and make an impact on the children's lives by providing individual attention and love.

In this issue of the One Heart Bulgaria newsletter, interns report their experiences as they grew to love the children in Bulgarian orphanages and two stories recount the successes of former orphans who were adopted.

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Interns Tyler Wall and Cole Crowther helped the children of Slaveikov orphanage make a "thank you" sign in English and Bulgarian to show their gratitude for the support they receive from donors.





## The Mariannos report

*Eric and Brittney Marianno served as interns in Assenovets. Brittney reports:*

Our five week adventure in Bulgaria was an amazing experience that we will never forget. The orphanage we lived in was located in a small village named Assenovets—basically the middle of nowhere, but it became somewhere to us as we got to know the villagers, sometimes their livestock, and of course the children.

There were about 50 children, 30 girls and 20 boys, all between the ages of 6 and 18. When we arrived we found that the kids had a few flat balls to play with and almost everything else was broken. Flat balls just wouldn't do for Eric and so we bought some new ones. We taught them good personal hygiene, English, dance, and all kinds of new games. The kids especially loved learning how to play baseball, the Hokie Pokie and Down by The Banks. They loved talking with Eric in Bulgarian and miming things to me until I understood.

Overall, we were able to give five weeks of love to these beautiful children and when it was time to come home I wanted to bring them all with me.





## Cole Crowther: my experience with One Heart Bulgaria

Tyler Wall and I served in the Slaveikov orphanage in Sofia with a group of about 15 kids between the ages of 7 and 11. I had an incredible time with the kids and got to know each of them on such a personal basis. There were a few eight year old girls that I particularly connected with (Albena, Ruby, and Desi). I became such good friends with them that it became very difficult to say goodbye. It was tough on the kids as well because they grew to love us.

I spent each day there besides the weekends and the majority of my time was spent playing with them and being their friend. They were on break from school for the summer so we did things at the park, learned how to play basketball and soccer, played all kinds of games, and read stories. I feel that just spending time with them made an impact on their lives. They were able to connect with us and see us as good role models, which is something they lack. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with them and grew to love them as my own nieces or nephews. The days were very flexible and so we had to be creative and plan activities for the upcoming days. For example, one day we took the kids to a museum of animals. It was nice to have so much freedom in what we did with the children. Often there was one director with our group who was very nice and great with the kids.

Overall I really enjoyed my experience and it has definitely made an impact in my life and it was something I'll never forget. I grew to really love those kids and I miss them and think about them regularly. The biggest help for those kids is to have good influences to help them make right choices as they get older and even though I was with them for a short month, I feel I was able to accomplish that to some degree. Thanks for having given me this opportunity!



Above: Cole (far right) and other interns spend time with Albena, Ruby and Desi at the Slaveikov orphanage.



**Donations may be made to help prospective interns defray their costs. If you are interested in helping with this program, please make a donation under "Internships" on the website [oneheart-bg.org](http://oneheart-bg.org)**



# Nathalie Rosado: they were starved for attention

For the first five days of my stay in Bulgaria, I lived with a family in Knazhevo, a neighborhood west of downtown Sofia. From the beginning they made sure to take care of me, feed me, and house me even though I had just met them. Our host, Temenouchka, made sure everything she cooked for us was perfect and would entertain us with stories of her youth and the communist oppression she experienced as a young girl.



***Nathalie really connected to Teddy, a little boy who suffers with cerebral palsy.***

After my stay in Sofia, Elena. Melea and I made our way to Razliv, a tiny village outside Pravets, about 30 miles from Sofia. There were only two stores, one restaurant, and the Razliv orphanage. As we stepped inside the orphanage, kids crowded around us, wanting to touch us, talk to us, and hug us. The three of us were assigned to take care of twenty or so kids, and we had no idea of what we were getting ourselves into. Since only one of us spoke Bulgarian, communication was very

difficult. But the children somehow managed to welcome us and show us around the village, making us take them on walks and talking endlessly, even though we could not understand them.

Our work was difficult, and although many times we felt like they were too rowdy and we were their punching bags, the most difficult part was seeing how the children were permanently affected because they knew their parents could not or would not take care of them. They were starved for attention. They wanted to be loved, and I hope we gave that to them.

Once a week, we would travel to Vidrare, an orphanage for children with physical and mental disabilities. It was here our work was the most emotionally draining. Children were crammed into tiny rooms in bunk beds, with as many as ten kids in each room. Although they were physically disabled, they were often left unsupervised. It was so difficult to think about the meaning of their existence and the reason why they had to suffer the way they did. In a way, it was a relief that they did not know of a better life. Because they were so used to what they knew, they made the best of it and found happiness in each other's company. Things we would consider small made their day. A walk in the afternoon, seeing a donkey on the road, crowding inside the orphanage to avoid a storm, having us there to hold them and play with them, making them feel like they mattered. To them, these were the only things they needed to make life wonderful.



***Thanks to the interns, children at Razliv orphanage experience sidewalk chalk for the first time.***



## Malea Martin: I had a strong urge to see for myself

Having spent the last year in Bulgaria studying at the American University in Bulgaria, I was a bit nervous to go to an unknown village and work in orphanages. After watching the BBC documentary Bulgaria's Abandoned Children I felt a strong urge to see for myself what Bulgarian orphanages were like. After all, Bulgaria is part of the European Union, how bad could it be?

Upon arriving at the Razliv orphanage, I was struck by how genuinely happy the children seemed to be because they had visitors and someone to pay attention to them. It was wonderful to receive so many hugs and tugs at our clothing because each child wanted our individual attention. While often times it seemed overwhelming to try to give attention to so many kids, everyday I left with a sense of contentment and happiness that I was able to help improve the children's day.

At the Razliv orphanage we were expected to come up with activities for the children to do everyday. But what I found the most difficult about that was the lack of supplies that the orphanage had for the children. Things that we often take for granted in the United States, such as a pack of crayons or a soccer ball, can mean a lot to children who have nothing. The other interns and I became very creative when it came to activities. We played games such as musical chairs, and duck, duck, goose and took the children on many walks which they really enjoyed. We even tried to play games such as basketball but with the language barrier it became complicated, but I think the kids enjoyed it nevertheless.

Vidare orphanage for the disabled



was extremely difficult to visit. The children have a variety of disabilities, but due to a lack of funding and training, don't receive all the services that they so desperately need. My most difficult moments were dealing with the unpleasant smell from unbathed children, who sweat in the poorly ventilated rooms. There's no air-conditioning or fans so the rooms can get pretty hot in the middle of summer. We did simple activities with the children such as taking them on walks and swinging them with a blanket which always made the kids laugh, especially the ones that were left in their beds for the greater part of the day.

I really enjoyed my time interning with One Heart Bulgaria, and am happy that I was able to see a side of Bulgaria I previously had not seen. I found that Nikolai Gavazov, OBH's Bulgarian director, was a big help to us on our trip, and that he really cares for the children. Thanks OHB for this great opportunity!



*This teenaged boy suffers from cerebral palsy and lack of therapy and attention. Interns carried and placed him on a mat so he could spend some time outdoors.*



# The Mandeville miracle



Anton & Velizar Mandeville are remarkable young men. Velizar (now 21 years old) was almost 4 years old when he was adopted in 1993. He had been cared for in the Shumen Dom Maika i Dete (Baby Orphanage) since birth. Velizar had a history of seizures and respiratory infections, but is healthy now. He is now working for Microsoft, attending college and plans to go into criminal justice. He has never forgotten those who cared for him in the first years of life.

Anton (now 18) was just 3 years old when he was united with his adoptive-family in 1995. He was raised in the Sofia Baby Orphanage in Lozenets until he was 2 years old, & then moved to the Gabrovo Baby Orphanage for 6 months. Anton had a cleft lip and palate, and some speech and learning issues. He is in college learning to be a fitness trainer, and competes in body building championships and varsity baseball. He, too, has strong ties to his heritage.

Anton and Velizar have participated in many events and activities to raise money to “give back” to those left behind. They sold candy bars to

benefit One Heart Bulgaria during their local FRUA INC Winterfest event, Heritage Camp, and at the annual picnic. They have helped with garage sales to raise money for orphanage support and collected clothing to send to orphanages.

In 2006 they had the opportunity to re-visit their “first homes” and brought needed shoes to the children in the Gabrovo and Shumen Baby Orphanages

FRUA INC (Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption Including Neighboring Countries) is a support group for families who have adopted from, or are in process of adopting from, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. There are many families who have adopted from Bulgaria and there are chapters throughout the United States. Besides family networking and support, orphanage support efforts ensure that the children left behind in the orphanages are never forgotten. The Washington state chapter has raised money for many orphanage and orphan support projects, including a remodeling project at the Shumen Baby Orphanage. More information about **FRUA INC** can be found on the national website at <http://frua.org/>

**FaCAB** (Families with Children Adopted from Bulgaria) was founded in 1995 as a family-to-family support network. The goal of this group is to share mutual information and support between families who have adopted from or are waiting to adopt from Bulgaria. Information about FaCAB can be found on the website at <http://www.orgsites.com/wa/facab/>

*The Mandeville-Weaver Family, Anton (left), Terry (middle), Velizar (right), Bob (front).*



# Isabella offers inspiration

To all orphans, former orphans, and adoptive parents, I write this to bring you hope and inspiration! My name is Isabela Kobs but to many I am known as "Izzy." I was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1988. I spent the next five and half years of my life in an orphanage where food was limited and where abuse and neglect were present. Among older teenage and young adult orphans, the suicide, prostitution, drug, and crime rates are very high. This is very disturbing especially to me (a former orphan). Despite the living conditions and the heartbreaks I endured, I consider myself one of the lucky ones. Here is my story:

In 1994, I was adopted by a hard-working American couple from Adams-Friendship, Wisconsin. My whole life changed that year! I was given a second chance at life! I really don't remember much of those days but from what my family tells me, it was quite an adjustment for me and my parents. To be honest, I don't know how they did it! They are my

miracle! My mom and dad have been my biggest supporters since... well ...forever! They are my rock and my motivators. Just seeing my parent's work ethic and their success has motivated me to want to work harder and has motivated me to want to become a better person. I have always told my mom that everything I do I do for them because I love them and I owe them my life, not because they demand or expect it. My parents have spent their entire lives making sacrifices for me. It's time I return the favor.

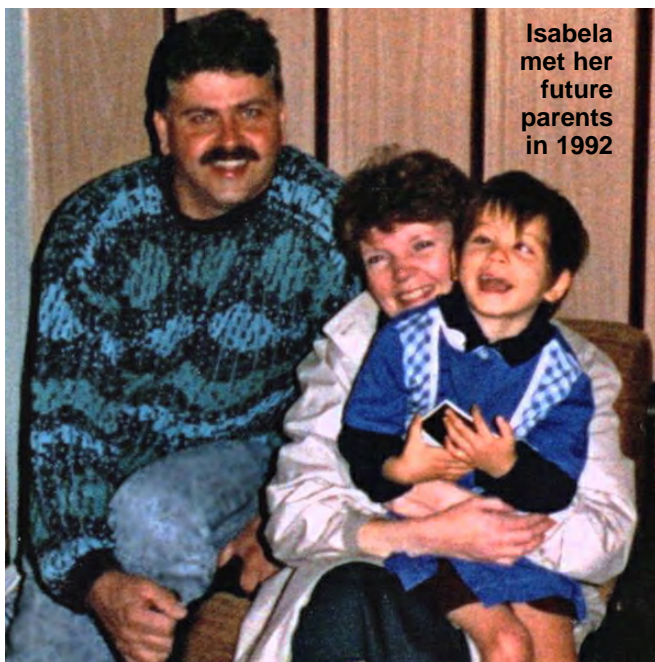
I know I still have a long way to go to reach the pedestal my parents are on! I just pray to God that one day I can be half of what they are. I would love to have my mother's strength! She is the strongest person I have ever met! I would also love to have my father's humor. He can make anybody laugh at any given moment. I would also love to have my parents' wisdom. They both are well educated and are very smart. Did I mention that they both have big hearts as well!?! I am doing what I am today because of my family.

So, here I am now. I am 22 years old, I studied criminal justice at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. I finished college interning with the Dept. of Justice (Interpol) in Washington D.C. It has been an amazing experience. I have truly grown as a stu-



dent and as an individual. In May, I graduated from Saint Mary's University. This has been a dream of mine ever since I was little. I was told by some that I would never be able to attend a four year University – school was never easy for me; as a matter of fact it was very difficult. I was determined to show everyone that I could do it! With the love and guidance of my parents and my professors I was able to make it on the Dean's list and have had a very successful college career. My hope is to one day be a United States Marshal; with my education and my internship opportunities, I am well on my way!

In conclusion, I want to share part of my philosophy on life. "You have to let go of the past hardships to move towards your dreams!" This can be a big challenge but if you focus on the gifts and opportunities God provides for you, it can be done. God gave me a loving family, a new life, and opportunities. I know if I had dwelt in my past I would have missed out on my future. I want to offer support and guidance to anyone who has questions about international adoptions, contributing to orphans in Bulgaria or the challenges of adoptees and their families. Please feel free to contact me [iskobs06@smumn.edu](mailto:iskobs06@smumn.edu).





## Baby Hristo has been adopted

One Heart Bulgaria field director Nikolai Gavazov reports, "I am pleased to share the following good news: Hristo Boikov Irinov from Sliven Orphanage, who had a shunt operation to correct hydrocephalus the end of 2008 in the Stara Zagora Hospital by Dr. Popov, has been adopted recently by an U.S. family. Such a blessing would not have been possible for this little boy without the One Heart Bulgaria shunt donation which saved his life."



## News of note

The Bratsigovo Orphanage Library and Literacy Program will be established in January 2012. Please consider contributing to the operational costs. You may donate at [www.oneheart-bg.org](http://www.oneheart-bg.org). Click on Special Projects/Programs/Bratsigovo Library.

Did you know November is National Adoption Awareness Month? There are 300 million orphans in this world who need a family. Consider it!!! Of course, the Bulgarian orphans are particularly dear to our hearts. For more information, visit our website <http://www.oneheart-bg.org>

TO SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTION RIGHT NOW, CUT OUT AND MAIL TO 561 North 150 West, Centerville, UT 84014  
Do you want to make automatic monthly donations? Visit [www.oneheart-bg.org](http://www.oneheart-bg.org) and click on "donate" to learn how.



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