

# **A House of Roses and the Woman of Samaria**

## **Four Working Days in Romania**

**by Peter Bateson**

*The Romanian publicity for this event states that Peter Bateson has had an almost 50-year career in residential curative education, management, organisation and implementation of community in the United Kingdom and the international Camphill Movement. Now officially retired he continues to work independently in various roles as trustee and advisor in various associations of Camphill in the United Kingdom. His particular interest is to explore and promote, in the words of Karl König, “our spiritual, social and Christian impulse”. He and his wife Etta live near Bristol in the west of England.*

The initiative for these working days arose when John and Roxana Byrde, the founders of Camphill Casa Rozei in Urlați, Romania, attended as guests at the international Camphill Movement Group meeting in The Mount Community, East Sussex, in June 2024. Casa Rozei was founded in 1991 in partnership with the State authorities, initially with considerable support from Camphill in Switzerland where John had been living and working for many years. It began in response to the dire need of help for local children excluded from the educational system, though soon found its main focus in responding to a call to take in those with severe learning difficulties amongst the countless abandoned children in state-run orphanages who were existing in a state of dreadful deprivation and hopelessness. True to say this situation has improved enormously over the years but there are still many sectors of unresolved need in Romania in the areas of special education, social care and social inclusion. In recent times Casa Rozei has gone through some difficult and challenging years, not least under the spell of Covid. It is run under the auspices of the General Directorship of Social Assistance and Protection in the county of Prahova, with close collaboration between the authorities and their appointed manager and the independent non-profit organisation- APISTSAB, which stands for “Association for furthering special education, social therapy and biodynamic agriculture in Romania”. They are considering changing the name to “Association for Inclusive Social Development”. John and Roxana are board members of this association together with a group of tried and trusted colleagues.

My interest in visiting Romania and being involved in these working days was initially ignited by discussions about John and Roxana’s new project to create a therapeutic ‘hub’ or ‘harbour’ in Urlați, and my journey was sponsored by Camphill Foundation UK & Ireland because the work at Casa Rozei was born out of and always inspired by the Camphill impulse. However, in preparation for the event it expanded into much more than that and included people involved in the curative work in Bucharest, in Waldorf education and the Anthroposophical Society. Consequently, the work of Camphill in curative education, using the adapted Waldorf curriculum, social and community development and above all the

inspiration and example of Karl König himself were at the centre of everything and had a profound effect on all those who participated in these days.

The first of the working days took place in Bucharest at the Centre for Curative Education and Social Therapy 'Corabia'. The name Corabia means 'coracle' in English. Like Casa Rozei, Corabia is a state-run organisation with an appointed manager, but through carefully maintained good relationships, mutual respect and professional collaboration the anthroposophical orientation of the school is protected. A wide circle of colleagues took part in discussions around issues of how to build a strong community of collegueship around the school's endeavours and how to preserve the dignity and well-being of pupil and teacher alike.

As in most places in the world it is a challenge to maintain the right level of understanding and collaboration with a diverse group of parents and we spoke in depth about how best to approach this ongoing task. Through this meeting, we wanted to explore a new connection to sources of spiritual and social renewal, in response to today's educational requirements. In order to strengthen the impulse and collaboration of all those involved in the school I was able to propose a threefold challenge. First of all, to agree on a clear form of words expressing the leading thought or 'star' of the project which everyone without exception could agree on. Secondly, to further strengthen the already impressive inner orientation and unified commitment of their college of teachers by developing further spiritual practice with the help of the book "Towards the Deepening of Waldorf Education". For decades this Goetheanum-sponsored edition has stood behind all the work of Teachers' Colleges in the curative pedagogy of the Camphill Movement. I gave a carefully protected copy of this book to the teachers of Corabia as a particular gift for their future work. Thirdly, we explored the idea of expanding a wide membership circle of stakeholders, supporters and friends who could commit themselves to helping and supporting the school in all kinds of practical ways, ideally including fundraising. This was a very lively and interesting working day with a strong feeling of warmth and comradeship.

In the evening of the first day the venue shifted to Casa Rudolf Steiner, the headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society in Bucharest, where I gave a talk entitled "Wellsprings for Spiritual and Social Renewal". I told the audience right at the beginning that my approach would be very much out of my own personal experience and convictions and therefore the inspiration and legacy of Karl König was a very powerful theme running through the entire evening. Spiritual, religious and social wellsprings which lie at the core of my own being naturally include those which belong to the Camphill Community, emanating from Karl König himself, for example 'The Lesser Guardian of the Threshold' and the 'Knighthood of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' but also not necessarily unique to Camphill but adopted by Camphill as part of its inner life, for example Rudolf Steiner's words on Faithfulness; the being of Iphigenia as the embodiment of the sacerdotal quality needed to balance materialism; and the Rosicrucian ideal running beneath all development in the last few centuries. I also drew inspiration from Shakespeare (Pericles) and Goethe (Iphigenia in Tauris), John the Baptist and the First Class

of Spiritual Science (Wachsmuth-Lerchenfeld) along with some less obvious and very personal sources such as lyrics from a song by The Doors!

The second working day took place in yet another venue, the headquarters and training centre of the Association for Waldorf Kindergarten Education in Southeast Romania. It was a more diverse group of people including those involved in Waldorf education, curative education, a combination of the two, and also Montessori. The issues and concerns that we turned to were quite similar in many ways to the ones of the day before: how to preserve the dignity of the child and the dignity of the teacher; how to facilitate the participation of children with special needs in normal classes; and how to work with parents towards the development of a school community. We came to a reflection contrasting the meditative approaches of the Moon path and the Saturn path, described by Rudolf Steiner and elucidated by Bernard Lievegoed in his deathbed interviews. While the customary Moon path involves the individual alone in an enclosed space in silent contemplation, the Saturn path entails full absorption in the rollercoaster of everyday life but learning to open doors of perception at any time into the spiritual dimension which lies behind everything that one encounters in life. This is also very much the path towards a contemporary Michaël culture.

We touched upon important indications given by Rudolf Steiner in the lectures “Meditativ Erarbeitete Menchenkunde” (Stuttgart 16th September 1920 GA 302a). We should look back to the pre-earthly life of the child with Reverence, to the further destiny after death with Enthusiasm. Here and now the whole task of the teacher is to maintain a “Protective Gesture” over the being and learning of the child. How desperately needed is this approach in our modern world!

The whole occasion was a very rich sharing of experience and knowledge from many different directions, and I’m happy to say that my own experiences, examples, convictions, anecdotes and also humorous stories from the past were a strong factor in the mix. One important aspect which I was keen to promote was the idea that a teacher or carer or a school or a whole organisation has to acquire the primary ability to *absorb* the challenging behaviour of children with special needs as a prerequisite to being able to bring about any kind of progress or healing. This was always one of the main keys to success in Camphill. Without that basic skill which cannot be taught but which needs to grow in the individual into an intuitive ability, no intellectually devised behavioural strategies will have any lasting success. We had a long discussion about what it actually means to ‘absorb’ challenging behaviour, and understood the link with Steiner’s exhortation to the curative teacher to “become a dancer!” Recall of significant and also amusing occasions helped along the way, such as a girl who simply learned over time to stop throwing and breaking flower vases, and the day when an autistic girl in our house threw a large pat of butter across the room which hit the piano and we all silently watched it slide slowly down and hit the floor. My wife simply said, “Next time, Alison, please don’t throw it at the piano!”

After a 30-minute turnaround and quick change of costume the second day culminated in a performance entitled “A Theatre Under One Hat”. This is a presentation I’ve developed over the last fifteen years, recreating the reading tours which Charles Dickens did of his own works from 1850 onwards. They have been performed in many venues and various countries

over the years and each performance is different from all the others. This one comprised dramatic and humorous readings from the novels *Great Expectations*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield* and was very well received by a warm and receptive English-speaking audience.

The third and fourth days were devoted to the new concept of a therapeutic ‘hub’ in Urlați, to be established by APISTSAB on and around the basis of existing achievements at Casa Rozei. In keeping with trends at the cutting edge of social development and Camphill’s own innovation, the idea would be to broaden the focus beyond the familiar sphere of children and adults with special needs and to be sensitive to other needs and requests which might come to light. This is very much in keeping with Karl König’s own avowed pledge to make the concept of curative education or the “curative approach” as wide as possible, including the needs of humanity in all forms. I myself am deeply engaged at present in thinking of this as an all-embracing “attitude of soul care” (Seelenpflege haltung) as a prerequisite for constructive approaches. It also resonates strongly with the founding of the new section at the Goetheanum for Inclusive Social Development.

How can we contribute to improving the quality of life for those at the margins of society or at the end of their tether? There is a lack of access and opportunity for those in need of support. Many people have fallen through society’s safety nets, from education and employment for the younger to adequate retirement provision for the elderly, or for example a lack of provision for those wishing to leave care institutions. It’s difficult to find someone to turn to with their dilemmas or the ways and means to cope with life’s challenges. Mainstream society itself is facing major challenges in all spheres of life: disintegration of families, societal dissatisfaction, economic uncertainty, migration, ecological degradation and climate change etc. We would like to create a place where people can come together raise their questions, explore the challenges they face and seek solutions which we would work together to provide. A very detailed 4–page proposal has been developed by John and Roxana ([apistsab@gmail.com](mailto:apistsab@gmail.com)). On the third working day we had a long brain-storming session with like-minded potential colleagues at a private house in Bucharest, to lay down some essential principles and clarify how to proceed.

The next day we had a complete tour of all the properties currently owned by or associated with APISTSAB. We first visited Casa Rozei itself, now on the ground floor of the huge pink building. Then to Casa Stela, up on the hill, standing in its own grounds, currently being run under the auspices of the state as a Casa Rozei social care home and with a large adjacent building, in a huge currently neglected garden, where once the bakery was thriving, alongside a food processing workshop and a still active workshop producing concrete pavers. The aim would be to bring all this back under the responsibility of the Association and to revive the activities with new energy and initiative.

Closer to the centre of Urlați is Casa Raphael, a four-bedroom house with workshop spaces and also a run-down garden which was once totally penetrated and beautifully productive. It’s possible to imagine a café being opened in this place, although somewhere more in the actual shopping centre of the town would be ideal. There is a great need for an experienced biodynamic gardener to come on a rescue mission and take this land in hand, both at Casa

Rafael and Casa Stela, even if this could only be for a fixed period of time. Both plots have previously been worked very successfully with organic methods.

We saw Casa Maria, a residential care home for adults within easy walking distance of the town-centre amenities. It belongs to APISTSAB and is run by Casa Rozei.

We visited some large open fields across the valley which already have planning permission for building houses. This can only be held in mind as an identifiable potential for future development. Further away from town, close to a beautiful church on the hill and near a spectacular viewpoint over the vast landscape, land is becoming available adjacent to the property of an inspirational and forward-thinking Orthodox priest involved in social development projects. The idea has arisen that further collaboration could lead to a drop-in centre and café in this location.

In Urlați there is a lot of potential and a working group will continue to plan the next steps for the 'hub', to make concrete decisions and inject new energy into activities in order to make progress in a timely fashion. The Romanian word "Butuc", meaning a hub, root or stem, has been considered as an overall name for the endeavour, which will hopefully comprise many different strands of activity in future. The concept of a "harbour" is also very real. This is still open, but a clear decision was made to name a square white building, adjacent ~~to Casa~~ [Casa Rozei](#), as "Casa Samaria". It is a wooden house originally constructed elsewhere by American soldiers, [then used by a Stuttgart Waldorf school](#), but moved here many years ago. It will not be difficult or expensive to renovate it to a standard whereby it can become the home of the hub. The name was chosen because the scene from the Gospel of the woman of Samaria at Jacob's Well was one of the spiritual wellsprings which I referred to in my talk. It is also one of the wellsprings which lies deep at the heart of the Camphill Community and ~~at~~ [the heart](#) of one of Karl König's own plays, written for Easter Saturday. In the context of our current challenges as human beings and of the situation in Urlați, ~~The~~ [the](#) meeting of the Samaritan woman with Christ symbolises the overcoming of barriers and preconceived assumptions in order to reach a moment of recognition, renewal and healing. This is so profoundly important in our modern time. A group of enthusiastic people will already be hands-on in Casa Samaria in mid-November to start transforming this into the vessel for the new and inspirational project.

This article actually only conveys a part of the full range of rich ~~inspiration,~~ [exchange](#) ~~inspiration,~~ [exchange](#) and learning that took place during those four days. Humanly it really was a true celebration, overcoming language barriers and meeting new friends and colleagues face to face to establish lasting ties for the future and uniting the efforts and concerns of a wide group of people involved in the worlds of Waldorf ~~education,~~ [curative education](#), [curative](#) education, the Anthroposophical Society and new endeavours in inclusive social development.