

## **Project 2015**

### **What happened to Cosmin's House? –Diary of building a house**

It has been too long I have not updated you about last year's project. Now that the new year has already well passed it is time to show all who support my ministry here in Romania what happened. The goal and main project of the year was to build a house for Cosmin, a 12 year-old boy with multiple handicaps and his family, father, mother, Andreea, his older sister, and Alexandra, his younger sister. They had been living in a rented houses so far, where the rent was often difficult to pay as it took more than half of the father's salary. Still the roof was leaking and the oven badly built and using way too much wood, but the owner felt not called to do the necessary repairs.

As I reported at another place, the family had gotten a piece of land from the city and already put the foundation or actually only part of the foundation on it. With the foundation on it, the property rested now for several years. Now as money came in (or not), the work was becoming serious.

The first thing to build was a shed to put all the materials. Partly to cover it from the rain, but more to keep others from taking them. Unfortunately Romania is not a place where you want to leave things just standing around openly, so in January wood planks were bought for a shed.

#### **January 30, 2015 – A shed is built**

Cosmin's father is working with one other man to put the shed into place. Holes are dug out of the earth, bars are erected, it is a long shed, to allow also room for the long bars and wood planks.



Now the work was getting serious – as well as the material bills. Brick stone was bought, mortar, nails, and more wood to make scaffolding and so on. Fortunately donations made this all possible and where the donations were not enough, an interest free credit stepped in.

Of course it was still too early to start building, it was still the end of winter and when it was finally the time one could start building in March – I was away in Germany. But the work continued without me.

### **March 30, 2015 – Walls have been raised**

It was somewhat surprising that when I came back from my travels and drove to the property at the end of March, the walls were already standing!



The family had already been waiting impatiently for me to come back as more ballast was needed to make the *centura*, the concrete belt that is finishing the walls and on which the roof is put. Together with the concrete pillars you can see in the picture in several places of the house, this is how here houses are built. I have never seen something similar in Germany, but of course I never really looked as closely as that.

### **April 16, 2015 – The outhouse**

Also built – though at this point only used as small, second shed for materials, was the outhouse. The ballast was brought as well as sand, and the work continued now I was back.



No, the house in the back is not Cosmin's it is the neighbor's, but the outhouse is.

Cosmin's parents, who both worked hard to help wherever possible, look at the developing house.



### **April 18, 2015 – Concrete for the centura**

One of the challenges in the course of building the house was the supply of water and electricity. In the street there is – still – no water supply yet, but fortunately a neighbor was willing to have us use electricity from his house, as he was already connected. So long extension cables are used to be able to use machines including the concrete mixer. The water was brought in a tank, 1,000 liters were bought each time. Making concrete needs a lot of water!



Materials kept coming and needed to be unloaded – sometimes the men were at work as most work at the house was done in the evenings; then Cosmin’s mother and I had to help to unload.

### **May 26, 2015 – Bars for the roof**

We need to get the wood for the roof construction. So we drive to the wood place. The material is there, but how to transport it? In the neighborhood we find a small transporter which is usually used for ballast, but since it is currently not needed, we hire it for 50 lei, get one man to help us and then three women – the wood seller is a woman as well – and one guy were loading the wood for the roof.





The owner drives the loaded transporter over, unloads and now only three of us move the wood from the front garden into the shed.

While the man carried the bars alone, the two of us work as pair to move all the diufferent lengths of bars to the shed.



When we are finished the shed is more than half full. We had to be careful that the piles hold and not fall down, the bars are only 12 cm x 12 cm, some 10 cm x 10 cm.

We had worked hard and only the shade of the shed covers my highly red face.



*May 28, 2015 – First works on the roof*



When I visit the first bars have been put on the centura, one can slowly guess what it is going to be. Strong metal wires are holding them in place. This is the way how the beams are fixed in Romania. Something I needed to get used to.

*June 1, 2015 – The roof continues ...*

The first upright bars are standing there, waiting to be completed. At this point they have to be stabilized but this will be removed later.



**June 10, 2015 - ... and continues**

Now the basis of the roof is ready and the covering can start. That means more wood planks need to be brought.



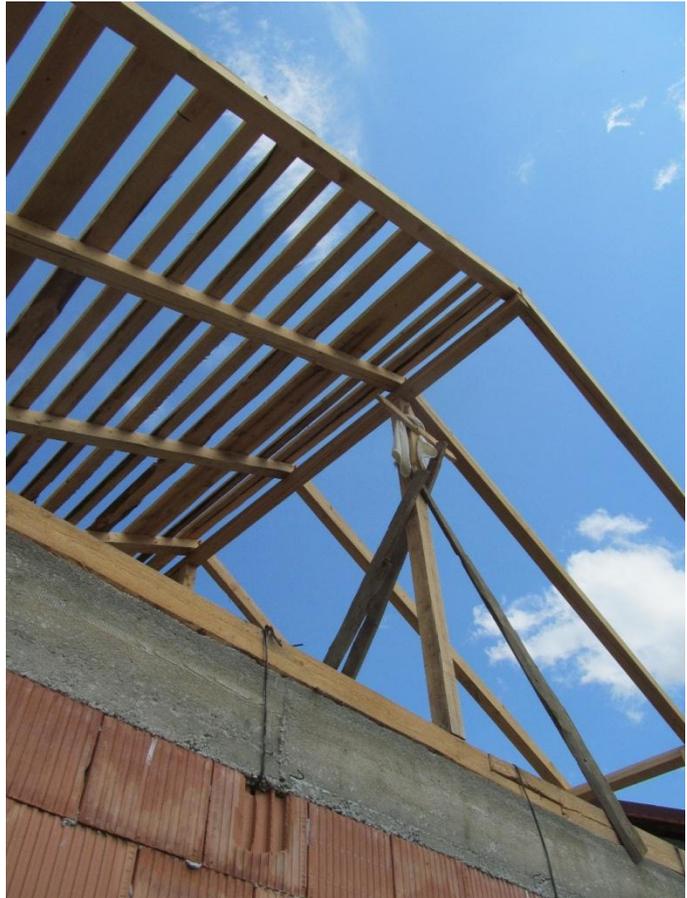
**June 16, 2015 – Close to the closing**

Now the structure to put the tablets on is made. The last step before the final closing of the roof. Things are moving!



**July 4, 2015 – Topping**

They didn't tell me when this happened, but even here is something like a topping happening, of course with some drinks as well, Țuica I am sure. A wooden cross and a towel are put under the roof. I assume they will remain there as a protection for the house.



**July 14, 2015 – Earth for the inside**

Earth is brought to bring the inside to one level. From the beginning they made a mistake in not leveling the inside, but in the different rooms there was a difference of I think at least 30 cm.



### *July 23, 2015 – Red roof*

Finally the red metal boards are put on the roof. The work is currently going slow as the person who has been helping from the beginning has started to make problems. He is a relative and he can not accept some rules I had to put up, so he begins to not come as often after work as he did it in his free time together with Cosmin's father and other men when needed.



### *August 31, 2015 – The tank*

You will notice the change in dates. The relative has now completely stopped to work, on top I was travelling for two weeks, but when I got back we talked about the situation – also financially as the finances were not coming in as strong as I had hoped. So we decided now to pay properly for the workers and concentrate to get the hall and the living room ready so the family can move in. I realize they are eager to leave the other place and use the money they pay there as rent for their own house. And if they want to live in a house only half ready, it is their decision. At least the roof will no longer leak and by the time they move in there will be a new stove. May be that is after all better than what they have there.

The water situation remains a problem but I finally get a tip and find a reasonable water tank for 1000 l which I get. The tank will not only save the rent for the mobile tank standing around here until the water is used, but also will be used later to collect rain water. The plan is then to put it into the earth.



September 2, 2015 – Preparations for the floor



Now as the roof is mostly finished the inside work can begin. The floor has been leveled with the earth brought – all was used. Now plastic is put on top to keep the humidity out and then metal grids put on top. The next step is to put concrete which will be stabilised by the metal grids.

The shed is full with the materials now needed, as well as with furniture I brought from Germany as the family doesn't have much of their own. Here people usually rent houses furnished. Cosmin's mother even found some windows she could get cheap, 50 € for two double windows.





The water tank is a big help and used a lot. As I said, later it will serve as reservoir for rainwater since the next well is about 50 meters away.

**September 3, 2015 – The floor is put in**



Thr concrete is put on, the floor begins to take form. The attic is still open – not the roof, just the attic as the concrete needs lots of air to dry out.

September 7, 2015 – Electric installation



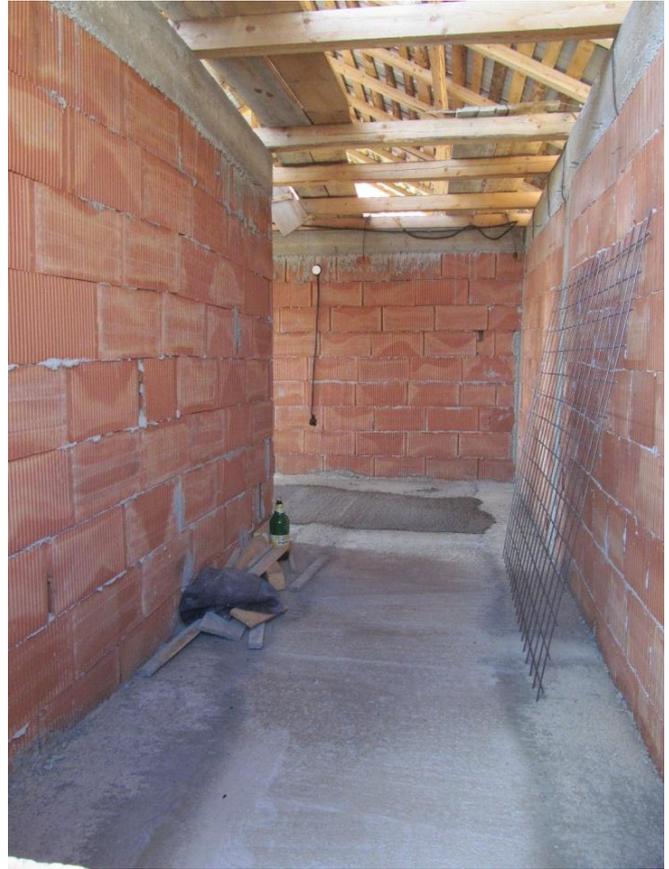
I am not sure if the way electric cables are put here in Romania by a licensed electrician (!) would be allowed in Germany. Somehow it looks strange to me, but since we are working to get the connection to electricity that's what it is.

More of the open air cables hanging just between the attic bars. The fuse box will be behind the door.





As I said: electric installations in Romania!  
Here you are looking from the front door into the hall



Here you look from the kitchen to the hall.

**September 9, 2015 – The walls are plastered**

The walls are getting closer to finalizing and are now plastered. The man first plastered small stripes and when they are dry he uses them to plaster the middle ground evenly with a plank. Easy but very effectful.



September 10, 2015 – Trailer for transport

When we can't find a machine to transport, which doesn't happen too often, fortunately, my trailer has to do the work – I am glad that with a load like this that the distance from the wood seller is not even a kilometer ... and we are in Romania ... and the local police knows me ...



Cosmin's father, mother, and uncle, and I are unloading together. But it is clear if we would not be an even number, I would not be allowed to help. A tendency very strong here towards church people.

The wood here is for the attic floor.

September 12, 2015 – The first windows

While the walls are still drying the windows are now put in, at least those we have already. The one for the kitchen needs to be made.



Over our heads Cosmin's father is working with one other man to make the attic floor in hammering planks to the bars.

The house looks good now! The small hole in the roof is still from the sulking relative, eventually it will be closed by somebody else and his salary cut. But at least things are moving forward and that is the most important.



**September 16, 2015 – The walls are getting ready**

Hall and living room are moving on, kitchen and the children's room are still with bare walls. But there is still work to do. Insolation, closing of the attic, painting, ...



**September 26, 2015 – The cross**



The works to close the attic begin, the cross from the topping with the towel have been moved further in and will remain there.



**October 6, 2015 – Attic closed, insulation of the ceilings and the main door is built in**



The attic has now been closed and a door built in to have access – only from outside though.

The insulation has started, the ceilings of the rooms are insulated – all of them as otherwise the winter will enter through those rooms. That is the minimum of work to be done, though the mother did not expect me to do that.

Here is the children's room, still with the raw brick stone.



The living room looks better with the nice walls though they are not yet finished.

In the afternoon the door and kitchen window are built in. They are thermopan and were specifically made.



**October 12, 2015 – The ceiling gets ready to be painted**



The white plates are screwed to the ceiling. In the corner the mosquito door which will be important in the summer.

The entrance was made from concrete as well, now one can easily enter the house. Before there were some blocks used to enter.



**October 23, 2015 – Ceiling completed**

In all rooms the ceiling is now completed. Even without paint the ceiling looks good.



The first furniture are brought from the shed into the house.

**November 7, 2015 – Calk is put on the walls**



After sanding the walls a layer of white calk is put on. In the hall the man is still sanding the wall to make it smooth for the calk.

**November 21, 2015 – More furniture for the family**

From a trip to Germany I come back with lots more furniture, table, chairs, carpets and some other things. One of Cosmin's favorite is the red and black leather seat.



The rooms – hall and living – have been painted by now, light pink walls and white ceiling - it looks really good. I admit I was not too convinced when I heard they wanted to paint the walls in pink.

**November 23, 2015 – The oven maker**



No heat without an oven and that means no moving in as the winters are getting really cold here; and Cosmin with his handicap has to have a warm room to live in. So after some investigation of Cosmin's mother we find an oven maker who is highly recommended to us. I am curious so I step in several times during the day and watch the making. It is clear that he knows what he is doing, even explains some of it to me.

**November 25, 2015 – The Oven**

The oven is ready, only something with the horn to lead outside the house needs to be solved. But it certainly looks nice and new!



### November 27, 2015 – The first tea in the new house



When I come this time the first furniture are set up in hall and living room and it looks already nice. Cosmin's mother disappeared and comes back with some water to make a tea for me – that has become a tradition when I come I am served a tea, mint which they collected.

Chairs and table are from friends who left them in Germany when they left the country, finally we agreed I could bring them to Romania. The chairs are partly pretty wobbly, but a screw here and there will solve that problem. And the white is pretty dirty but we plan to make covers for them. The table can be extended, ideal for a family where other family and friends like to visit.

### December 2, 2015 – The move

I had expected they would call me, but I had to teach as well and when I arrive with the trailer they are just taking out the last set of things to move to the new house. A few trips with the horse cart today, some they had already brought up every time they were going up to the new house which from their former residence was about a kilometer away and the move is done. I only see the locking up of the gate. The house is in the back, one can't see it on the picture, the gate just in the middle of the horse cart.

Part of the rather rushed move out was that the landlady got pissed when she was told they were moving out. Since they do not give notice here as we are used from Germany like a month or more in advance, she was only told a couple of days ago and then wanted them out as fast as possible; even though she has nobody to take it. Rather irrational, as she now won't even get the rent for December any more. But it has something good as well, the move was finalized within two days.



Arrival at the new home, there we unload.



Cosmin was already in the new house when we got there, for him a change like that can be difficult. His mother tells me last time they moved in took him 2 months to get used to the new place. Of course we hope this will not be the case again. When Cosmin is cranky he can be very tiring.



This is now home and likely will be for the rest of his life.

### **December 4, 2015 – Curtains**

When Cosmin's mother tells me she got new material for curtains from a relative, but they need to be shortened, I offer to bring my sewing machine to do it in the house, so we can measure. It turns out so well and since I have lots of materials I got from a neighbor who owned a clothes making business, I offer to also make curtains for the doors and chair covers. I will work here and leave the machine here. Here is space on the table to do that kind of work.



*December 9, 2015 – The curtain maker*



The work on the curtains and covers has begun. Two curtains for the entrances to kitchen and children's room, and six covers for the chairs. I come several times to help with that. Cosmin's mother and the sisters don't know how to use a sowing machine, but help in preparing the material with needles after I showed them how to do that. Alexandra, the little sister is fascinated by the sowing machine and would like to learn it. We'll see.

*December 19, 2015 – The blessing of the new home*

It had been Cosmin's mother's greatest wish to have the house blessed before Christmas. It would not feel right if it would not be blessed for the feast days, she told me several times. It took a while before we found a priest who could do it as in Advent the priests have a lot of duties. But finally Pr. Marcel from Sf. Toma, the cemetery church agreed to come.

And of course for this the house has to shine. So I use the time to take a walk through the house – especially the two finished rooms.

The chairs look good with their new cover, it is the first time I see them. And the colors are good not to show every little bit of dirt as the white before did.



In the hall the table with all the necessary things for the priest to use has already been set up.



Two candles with towels for the priest and cantor, this is for them to take home but also to use during the service, a bowl with water to be blessed for the sprinkling if the house, a bushel of basil for the sprinkling, a small censer with incense, a piece of charcoal (covered by the censer), a cup with oil for the blessing, two sticks to apply the oil to the walls, a second cup with flour, that there may be always food in the house. Then there is a sheet with names of people who will be prayed for, including all those who gave money and supported this project, I was specifically asked to bring a list.

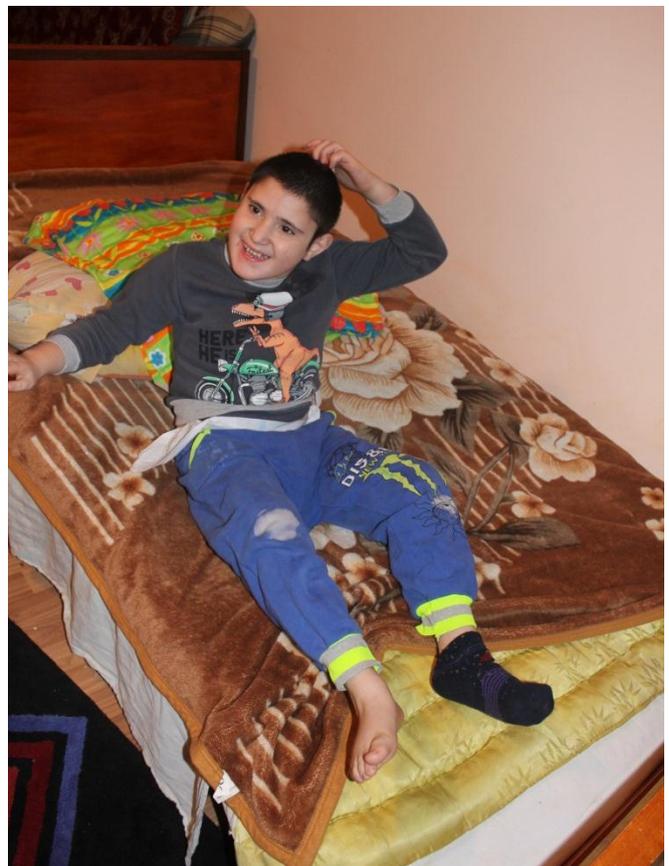
Now let's look at the rooms. First you see the finished living room. The children even put some big stickers to the walls with flowers mainly, and the colors of all make it look like home.



View towards the street side in the living room. The TV is running most of the time in Romanian homes, something I will never get used to. Today of course it is off and the children, also from other parts of the family and neighbors are playing on the floor.



Cosmin, who surprisingly already seems to have accommodated in the new home is happy and jumps around on the bed. And he loves to take off his socks all the time.





In the hall the table has been prepared for dinner afterwards, in the sideboard are some icons and the plant brings some nice green into the room. The carpet gives the room a special warmth. One can see they are at home here.

With incense the house is smoked while the cantor sings the prayers.



Family, friends and some neighbor children have come to participate in the celebration.



Cosmin comes as well, his grandmother is looking after him as his mother has to look that the priest gets what he needs.



It looks nice when the candles are burning – a table of prayers for the house, those who live in it and many others.



Cosmin’s mother takes the blessed water and blessed oil and follows the priest who now sprinkles the walls in each room and makes an oil cross.

I try to follow, but that happens quickly.



Pr. Marcel knows Cosmin and the family. In his church he is taking communion the few times his mother takes him to church as he is getting very nervous in other surroundings. So now he gets the first blessing with the blessed water – not necessarily to his liking, the way he ducks down.





Here will be the room of the girls.

The last cross goes next to the entrance. From the amount of shoes on the stairs one can see that people are used to take off their shoes when they enter a house. Guests of honor like the priest of course not.



Then all the people present receive a blessing with the blessed water – and priests tend to use quite some water for that. I get it too of course, Pr. Marcel knows me from various occasions.



Almost at the end of the service the prayers for the people are said, people who have died, but mostly those living, in need and for the health of those who supported this project. It turned out that after the celebration, when we had dinner together, that Cosmin's mother only had realized then that they had not put my name on the list and she was totally crushed over that. It took the priest and myself a while to ensure them, that that was not a problem and that God would still take care of me. I am sure though she went the next day to light a candle for me somewhere.



The priest speaks some final words, kind of a short sermon about faithful house and family keeping and about the blessing of having help through our joint believe in God.



The house is blessed, now it is time for dinner, since it is fasting time we have fish – today is the last day before Christmas that fish is allowed. A great soup, a wonderfully prepared main meal with sarmale, the Romanian filled vine and cabbage leaves and other dishes – talking to the priest I forget to take a picture, it would have been worth it.

The day is passed, the house has been blessed and with the help of so many we have reached a main point in the project. The family has moved, there is no longer a leaking roof or problems with the oven – they proudly tell me almost every time how little wood the oven consumes. Wood is expensive here as most households are using it. Just that is taking a big burden from them.

The house is not finished, there is still money needed to complete the interior and to build the two additional rooms – bathroom and a small bedroom for the parents. Without water supply yet there is no hurry. And for the moment they all sleep in the one big room. That is too something very common here in Romania as people heat their houses during the night as their bedding is not very warm and inadequate in winter. So to save wood only one room is heated and the whole family is sleeping together in that one room.

The water supply and canalization has been promised for this year 2016 – but it is the year of elections and by the end of June the elections will be over. The business of the city to get streets repaired and the places nicely decorated with flowers will likely end then. And political promises will mostly not be worth the paper they are written on. But we'll see. Sometimes even here miracles happen.

But when it comes it would be great also to get the bathroom ready, a room they have not had in all their life in that family. They are used to go outside to the outhouse at any time of day and night and in any weather possible, sun, moon, rain, snow, on muddy ground or dry. I don't think we can really imagine what that means. Only once in my life I was staying for a few days in a place where there

was an outhouse. I remember stepping out during the night barefoot – a big mistake as within half a meter I stepped into some naked snails. So I turned around to get my shoes as it was a certain distance to the outhouse. I have always been blessed with a bathroom inside. And until there is a bathroom with running water the house is not finished from my point of view.



The house has been blessed and the family says **THANK YOU!** to all who supported this project and all who will still support it. This is not a one-time thank you. I hear it again and again, and I see it in their faces, even those of the children. They are happy, they have a home, a home that is theirs. Thanks to you.



*God bless you all!*

