

Ways the Romany transformed Ralph!

Through 22 years of serving the Romany in Hungary and Romania, I learned more than a few lessons. Paul is told in II Cor. 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” What follows shows how God used my weakness to transform a relationship. As one hand reached for the handle of the car door, the other cradled the set of keys I had just tossed to him. He seemed to pause and take a deep breath and even seemed to wipe a tear away. I asked what was wrong and he replied, “Never has a “gadjo” (non-Romany) showed me such trust.” With poor night vision myself I had planned for some time to help Jozsi secure his driver’s license so that he could help on the long Sunday night drives back to Budapest. Not only was I putting my car in his hands but also my life. I learned that if I am willing, God will use my weaknesses to bring about deeper relationships.

I also learned deeper, spontaneous and genuine hospitality. As the Friday evening leadership conference closed we were divided up to go and stay in the homes of local Romany believers in the village. I met a young man who walked me to his humble home. It had two rooms, the first a small room with a wood stove for cooking and two single beds. But I was shown into the second room which was obviously the parents’ room. It had a huge bed! I had been introduced to the wife and two young children. They apologized that there was only an outdoor privy and indicated I was to sleep in the master bedroom. I tried to protest that I was only one and they were four and I would be comfortable on one of the single beds. They insisted time and time again that I was to have the large bed to myself in the master bedroom. I often experienced such unconditional hospitality with the Romany. When I would show up they would push aside the inexpensive off-brand Cola’s and rush to buy the higher cost Coca Cola for their guest. As Americans we often offer hospitality from our abundance. I learned what it means to offer hospitality from scarcity.

We have all learned that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” It is sometimes humbling to receive a gift from someone that is dirt poor. That is turning the equation upside down and yet we need to esteem such a gift. One such gift came our way one Sunday morning after worship in a Romany village. I had helped a believer upgrade fencing to secure his 80 chickens. He was losing

chickens daily but had no means to secure them. Thrilled with the result of shared labor digging postholes and shoring up the fencing, he presented us with a white bucket. Peering into the bucket we found two chickens, heads freshly severed! I learned to accept such gifts humbly, thus allowing the giver to express their thanks!

Weakness, hospitality and humility were ways in which God transformed me!
Ralph Stocks