Dear Hope of Survivors Family,

Traveling overseas is rewarding, yet fraught with many challenges. Each time we board a plane for another country I know that, if Heaven had not commissioned us, we would never go. Yet, as we see God opening doors and changing lives, we thank Him for the privilege to go where He leads. Somewhere between setting up bank accounts and running back and forth between the court and notary, God revealed to us that He still has a master plan.

Samantha's cousin Maria's (who is part of The Hope of Survivors-Romania) husband Marian, had contacted a pastor from a small village community near Bistrita and arranged for us to visit his church. The week had been very tiring already and we really did not want to make the long drive out into the country to visit someone who was more than likely going to show us hospitality from obligation, rather than a desire to meet some foreigners passing through his town. Yet Marian seemed really desirous to go so we decided we should show appreciation for all the effort he had put forth to make this connection for us.
On the way out to the village, Marian shared something that made the trip more incredible than my wife could have ever dreamed. He told her that her grandfather had a brother, whose son was named John, and that John is a shepherd in that community. You see, until two years ago, my wife did not even know she had family in Romania because all the connections were lost for nearly a hundred years when her grandfather left that country as a teenager and never returned. All she had was a few pictures and a postcard that was, ultimately, traced back to a small village in the northern part of the country where his family had been wondering for decades what happened to their son. And now Samantha is on her way to visit a second cousin who is caring for his flock all these years later.

As evening was approaching, we neared the place where the John was caring for his sheep. Far across the field, we could see someone standing with his flock. Slowly, our car maneuvered through ruts, potholes and several precarious booby traps to the spot where John the shepherd was. As we approached John, I saw a man whose stature few will be able to compare with. No, not in height, but in inner strength. While I personally did not know him, in his eyes I could see a true shepherd, one who truly loved and cared for his flock. What a vast difference to many pastors who are called to care for the flock of God and abandon their sacred post to hurt, and often destroy, their sheep.

I asked Marian how John knew all those sheep and he told me something I will never forget. As we looked over a flock of more than 300 sheep, Marian told me, not only does John know each sheep personally, he knows each one’s mother and grandmother too. Seriously, I thought, how could this even be possible? To me, they all looked the same. Could he really know them all that well? Later, as I pondered this amazing man and his care, I thought of Jesus. Of course! Now it all made sense! What I saw was nameless sheep; what John saw was precious little lambs. He was there when each one was born. He watched as it grew and cared for it as his own.

And for you, my dear friend, Jesus has done the same! He left Heaven to secure eternal life for you and, even though you may have been hurt and abused by someone who was
supposed to show you God’s amazing love and grace, Jesus never left your side. With each pain you felt and tear you shed, He was right beside you, holding you in His arms of love. And one day soon, He will take you home to the city whose maker and builder is God. He loves you, and I pray you surrender you heart to the One you who carries you in His.

God bless you,
Steve Nelson
President