Using Karate to Make the World a Better Place in Romania and Here at Home.

For those that are part of our program you know that I am a big believer in volunteering and community service. We really work hard to use our school to make the world a better place.  This summer I had the chance to go back to Romania for the second time and serve the Romanian people.  I'll tell you more about that experience in a minute, but first I want to mention how much our staff volunteers here at home to make our community a better place.

Our staff regularly volunteers hundreds of hours a year serving the local community.  I am proud of that our Instructors have discovered the joy of serving others.

For instance, this year we have provided free Women's Self-Defense seminars in elderly communities, and in high schools, free Bully Protection classes to middle schools, and free Predator Protection classes to grade schools and child care facilities.

Every year we raise money and pack food for Feed My Starving Children.  We also raise money and run a toy drive for pediatric cancer in partnership with Cal's Angels Foundation.  Our Instructors donate private lessons and Birthday parties to be raffled by Patty's Pals which raises money for Breast Cancer foundations.

Our Operations Director, Mr. Hutson, has traveled to Haiti to teach karate to kids in orphanages and this year traveled to Greece to teach self-defense and safety classes to refugee aid volunteers.

So when I was asked to be part of a mission trip to serve in Romania by teaching karate and being a camp leader I was pretty excited.  It was so rewarding to see the joy that the karate class brought to the Romanian people.

As you may know, Romania is a former communist country that has a struggling economy and the average family has little disposable income. Most kids cannot afford the luxury of going to summer camp.  So part of my mission was to raise money for scholarships for kids to go to camp.

**Not a Vacation**

I want you to know that although we enjoyed the work, it was not a vacation. It was work. The days were long - the work day started at 8:00am and we worked until nearly midnight each day. The living conditions were a little rough for me being a spoiled westerner. I had one bathroom for 25 men and had a hard time sleeping with all the snoring. But the time flew by because of the joy and significance of the work.

**The Musty Mansion**

This year the camp was at a "former estate" that was converted into a youth hostel.  The house was 300 years old and the foundation was 500 years old. Some of the building was refurbished while some of it was a little dilapidated. I bet it was grand in its day but the musty building was pretty rough on the allergies - but it was part of the adventure.

**Who Came to Camp**

The definition of "youth" in Romania is different than ours.  The Romanian definition of youth is high school until you get married. So we even had several people in their 30's attend camp.

The purpose

My church here in America partners with a church in Romania. Our mission was to give support in resources and skilled workers in order to give kids a great camp experience and help them grow in their faith.

Under communism it was illegal to be a person of faith and all religious teaching was outlawed. Now that communism is gone from their country the Romanian people are really interested to learn about what the Bible teaches and they are grateful to have the religious liberty of deciding for themselves. I admit, this is a liberty I have taken for granted here in the United States.

**American Team Duties**

The American team consisted of 13 people, 6 of them were the Nelson's.  We were responsible for all the fun events and teaching.  They asked me to teach a daily 2 hour martial arts class which of course I was happy to do. Click this link to watch my introduction demo at camp.

<https://www.facebook.com/NationalKarate.IL/videos/10153849801183367/>

My wife and oldest daughter (18) helped run an arts & crafts elective and my son (15) and a friend ran the sports elective. My youngest daughters (9 & 11) babysat the worship leaders 3 year old so he could focus on his work.  We also lead a small group Bible study daily and had opportunities to share teaching time and testimonies.

We organized some pretty crazy group activities that included a color war and field games with giant soccer balls that we brought from America and donated to the Romanian church.

And Since Romania had been controlled by a dictator and communism, the Romanian pastors wanted to bring the students to Mauthausen Nazi Concentration Camp. It was a sobering reminder of human suffering at the hand of evil.

**Here is one story...**

Some of the people at the camp had abuse in their background.  One young lady absolutely loved my karate class and was thrilled to earn her white belt. She was always the first one to the karate class and the last one to leave. In a lot of ways she acted like a little girl, perhaps because she was robbed of her childhood. Every time she saw me outside of karate class she would do a karate bow and laugh. It was really rewarding to see the joy that the karate class brought her.

It was also really great to see so many students from last year come back and join my class again. How fun to have National Karate students on the other side of the world!

What I will remember the most is the genuineness of the relationships.  The Romanian people are so sincere and honest in their feelings. And they love to laugh.  We could all use more of that.

I went there with the intention of serving them but after leaving I feel like I was the one who was blessed.