

Saturday, 6 November 1999

Dear Dad,

G'day from Vienna! Tomorrow's my big sister's birthday. Hope she had a nice one. Glad you liked the last "colour letter". Here's a photo of me taken a few weeks ago as I addressed a staff conference in Brasov, in Transylvania, Romania. I don't get many photos taken of me, because like father like son, I'm usually the one taking the pics. Brasov, pronounced *brush-of*, still has a medieval centre although the rest of the city, one of the larger ones in Romania, is populated by those awful Stalinesque apartment blocks. We stayed in a good quality (for Romania) hotel just on the edge of the oldest part of the city. It happened to be their beer festival week (just a coincidence, the staff assured me – yeah, yeah). It was fun to walk around the old city one evening with some of the colleagues, and even have a couple of beers. There are over 100 World Vision staff in Romania and this conference was more of a family retreat with about 250 people present. I was only there a couple of days and spoke one night on "Prayer" – a topic I am the least qualified to speak on. My most common prayer is "Good Lord, HELP!"



While I was there our Romanian director took me off to see the so-called "Dracula's Castle." This is a very nicely preserved ancient castle strategically sited on a knoll in a mountain pass to make it impossible for passing merchants to get by without paying the toll. It is nicknamed Dracula's castle because it was the birthplace of Vlad the Impaler, one of the defenders of Romania against the Turks. He became rather notorious for displaying the head of every captured Turk on a stake. They say there is a field near Bucharest in which more than 1,000 heads were once displayed. This is a few centuries back, of course. Bram Stoker apparently based his Dracula story on this historical figure. Most Romanians aren't that impressed with this peculiarly western European distortion of Transylvanian history and culture, but I noticed that quite a few were sufficiently impressed to try to sell me Dracula souvenirs.

It was great to get your letter. You are right that we are all greatly blessed to have lived through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. You've seen four-fifths of it. And I only half. But it has been a century of amazing change. One is even more keenly aware of this over here. We live in such close proximity with history. Hitler and the Nazis seem mere minutes in the past. Echoes of them resonate loudly in the recent elections here. If I were an Austrian, I would be more dismayed.

The technology that puts these photos on paper still has a long way to go to match the clarity of a continuous tone photograph taken with a Carl Zeiss lens, don't you think? I remember you making this observation once about television pictures. They look real sharp on the TV screen, until you project a 35mm transparency on the wall, six feet across, with every blade of grass as sharp as sharp. My favourite photos remain a series I took with my Nikormat of Melanie in our front yard at Ferny Hills. They were transparencies. You could count her eyelashes. Can't do that yet with this new technology.

Now we have the Internet and the Carters and we have been exchanging pictures by email. When I get my photos "printed" now they come as prints as before, but they also include a CD-ROM that has all the pictures in digital form. Here's an example;



This is the morning people going to work in Brasov. Our hotel is on the left, the beer tents on the right and the girls in the red and white parkas who serve one brand of beer in the middle.

Last year when we were in Germany I saw a display of antique cameras. Among them was the camera you let me use with the big revolving focal plane shutter. Do you remember it? It took half-frame pictures I think. It had two wheels on the front. One for shutter speed

which was mechanically connected to the focal plane shutter. The more you turned it, the more the *slice* in the shutter opened or closed. Very clever.

Glad to hear that Mum continues to have a pain-free and pleasant time. And sorry to hear that you're not always feeling the best. It must be frustrating to be dropping off to sleep at a time in your life when you can just sit and enjoy a good book or TV program!

That was amazing about the Religious Knowledge prize at Brisbane Boys' College. I do remember getting it actually. I wonder how it ended up in your desk. Judy and I have decided that when we go back to Boronia we are going to convert an entire wall of the family room into one huge bookcase. We both love books. We've read so many in our lives and keeping them all is a kind of personal history.

Speaking of modern times, Richie now has a mobile phone of his own! They are so cheap now that we decided to get him one. He doesn't use it much, but it can be really helpful (like last night) when I have to pick him up from a friend's flat and cannot find a place to park. Pretty common in this part of the world.

The seasons here have changed for sure. A few weeks back most of the trees turned a beautiful gold or red. It's a stunningly beautiful time of the year. I took a video driving through the woods, but honestly the video just cannot capture the colours. It's been windy last week so now it's beginning to look more like winter. Temperature last night, as we came back from seeing a play in the tiny 60-seat "International (read *English speaking*) Theatre", was a cool 9 degrees. Too soon for snow, of course. We're looking forward to having Melanie and David with us in a month or so, and hopefully Jamie. With him, you never can tell.

Lots of love from us all,