

The Georgiu Family

As Romanian emigrants, Alex and Julia Georgiu might have decided that learning a new language and culture would keep them busy enough. But being 5,000 miles away from their homeland wasn't enough to stop this special couple from helping a vulnerable child in their adoptive community.

"I rarely read the paper," says Alex. "But I picked it up one day and it fell open to a photo of a child." It was an ad from Olive Crest that read, 'Do you have a place in your home for me?' The couple quickly decided that they did have a place in their home. "We have a soft heart for kids," says Alex. "We didn't realize the children get financial support from the state, or anything like that. We just said, 'of course we will do it.'"

The Georgius' biological children were nine months and three years old, so they thought a child under five would be the best fit. But their Romanian heritage led them down a very different path. "The placement coordinator called and said there was a 12-year-old Romanian girl," Julia recalls. The girl had come to the U.S. at the age of four and spent years in an abusive adoption home before ending up as a foster child in group care. Julia and Alex felt that their shared heritage was a compelling reason to welcome her into their home.

When they picked her up at the group home, the staff told them they were taking home a kid who had been through a lot. Trust was a major issue for her. "Every time she got close to us, she would do something bad to see if we would keep her," says Alex. Many times Julia had to call Alex home from work, and the couple worried about the effects of so much stress on their young children. But they never gave up and continued to include her in family events, even taking her to Disneyland.

Gradually the couple began to understand how their daughter ticked. "She realized when she did something wrong," says Julia. "She would cry and cry." They became aware that feeling trapped was a trigger for her negative behavior. "It's not that she was a bad kid," Alex explains. "We learned to be careful never to push her into a corner. I always tried to help her see that there's a way out of most situations." To help their daughter focus on developing positive behavior and communication, Olive Crest took her on a tour of the juvenile detention center, illustrating what her life might be like if she did not make good choices.

Realizing that her Romanian heritage had been ignored and even cast in a negative light in her abusive adoptive home, Alex and Julia decided to foster interest and pride in her native culture. This culminated in a decision to find her birthmother in Romania. It wasn't an easy undertaking. They learned as much as they could about the small village where their daughter was born and wrote to the mayor, sending photos and asking for his help. He wrote back, explaining that her birthmother still lived in the village but was disabled and lived in extreme poverty. "When we came to the house, with its broken windows, broken door, and weeds half as tall as the house, their daughter was shocked. Alex recalls thinking "It would have been condemned anywhere else in the world." But her birthmother was welcoming, showing them pictures of her as a baby and toddler. They also met her grandmother and visited the orphanage where she had lived.

"There were rumors that children who were adopted by Americans were being sold for their body parts!" Alex says in disbelief. While at the orphanage, the family was able to reassure the children that these frightening rumors were false. "We introduced our daughter and said, 'Look at her, look at the good things that can happen'," says Julia. The trip was a turning point for their daughter. "Now she's so proud to be Romanian, and she's part of the community," Alex says. "We helped heal that portion of her life."

Today, the Georgius are proud of their daughter: a promising young adult making her own way in the world while staying very close with her family. Together, they have spoken at foster care awareness events. "She's changed a lot. She's very responsible, and she fights so hard to make a living," Alex says, his voice full of pride. What's missing is the credit this very special foster family deserves for sticking by their daughter, strengthening and encouraging her to grow, thrive, and give back to her community

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