

# 24th International Montessori Congress

Paris, France, 2-4 July 2001



## TRIBUTE TO REBECCA AULT

Marolen

I am delighted to assist your efforts to give Rebecca the tribute she so richly deserves.

Casa Speranta (House of Hope), founded in January of 1991 by a small group of Americans, was the first organization in Romania to demonstrate an alternative to institutionalisation for HIV positive children. The intent was to create a child-centred, respectful, family-oriented home environment for a maximum of 30 children and to teach others, by our example, how to do similar work.

Because of profound neglect, and even abuse, in their infancy and early childhood, the children were seriously developmentally delayed and very frail physically when they came to us. We were told by the medical experts that the children would die very quickly outside of a hospital/institutional setting. The children did not die, in fact, they quickly began to thrive and learn. After about one year, it was clear that the children were ready to be offered some type of formal education. Rebecca was approached about travelling to Romania to begin a Montessori Kindergarten. As was typical of our friend, Rebecca, she quickly agreed and the rest is history.

During her first two-week trip to Romania, Rebecca identified and began training two lay teachers. She set up a simple classroom and divided the children into groups according to their needs. I will never forget the first day the children entered their newly prepared environment - they just began work as if to say "What took you so long?"

As a result of the excellent preparation they receive in our Casa Speranta kindergarten, those children who are physically and emotionally stable attend and excel in Romanian public schools. Children with a history of institutionalisation and abuse are winning academic honours in their first through sixth grade classes.

One of my favourite stories involving Rebecca occurred during one of those first days of school. Adi, a little boy of four, was profoundly damaged by the abuse and neglect he had suffered. He was angry and compulsive and very strong -- a dangerous combination. The classroom equipment included a hammer and something for the children to pound - I forget exactly what. Rebecca was observing the children when Adi spotted the hammer. As quick as a wink he grabbed it and threw it across the room hitting Rebecca in the middle of her forehead. Because Adi was strong and the hammer was metal, I'm sure the blow was extremely painful. Rebecca never batted an eye, she sat for a moment and said "We must find a way for this child to throw things. He clearly has a great need for this type of activity." She was quickly at work developing throwing activities for Adi.

Rebecca was my dear and precious friend. My life was richer because of her love. I'm certain those of you who knew her felt the same way...