

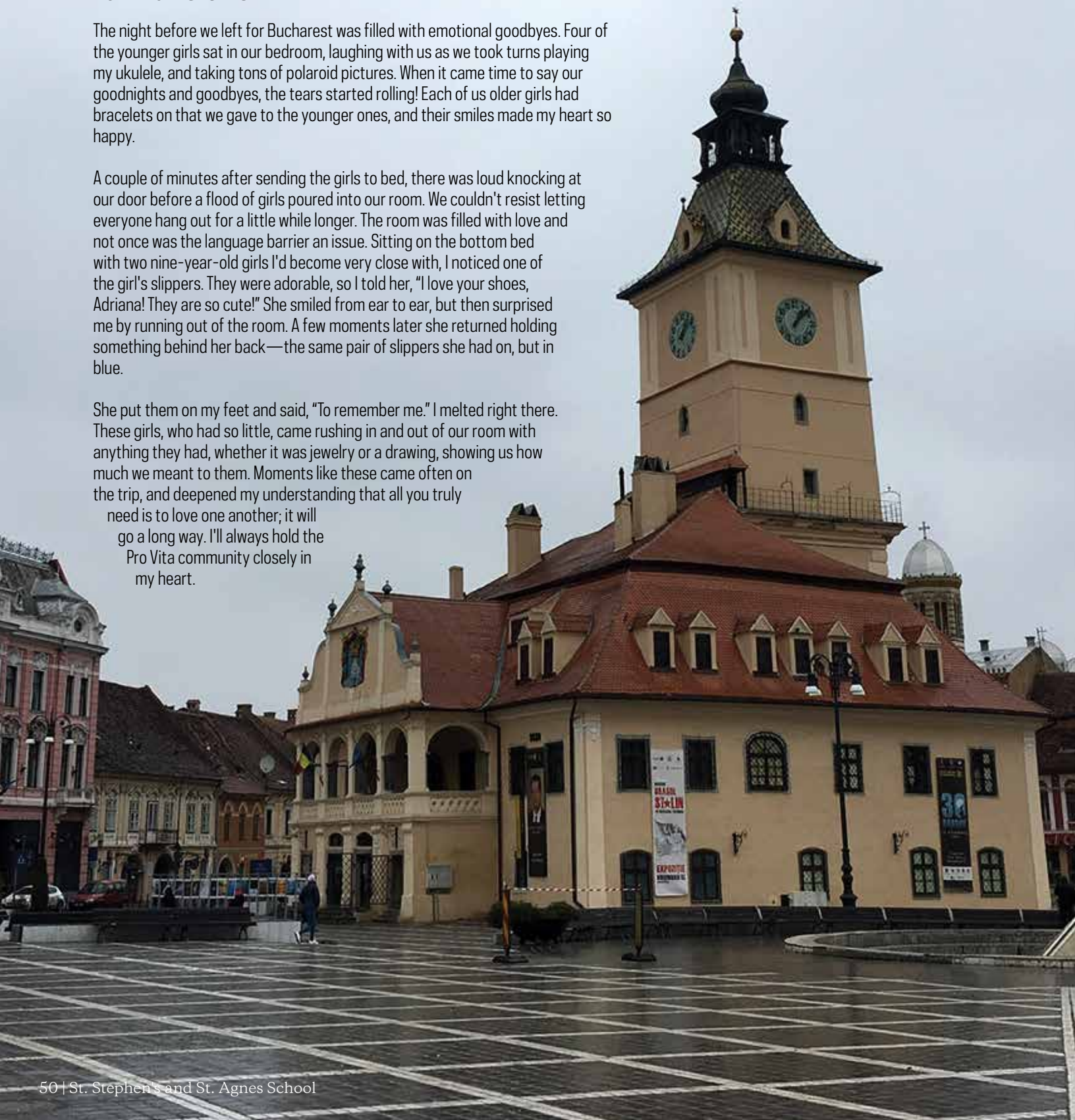
ROMANIA

NOELIA VARGAS '20

The night before we left for Bucharest was filled with emotional goodbyes. Four of the younger girls sat in our bedroom, laughing with us as we took turns playing my ukulele, and taking tons of polaroid pictures. When it came time to say our goodnights and goodbyes, the tears started rolling! Each of us older girls had bracelets on that we gave to the younger ones, and their smiles made my heart so happy.

A couple of minutes after sending the girls to bed, there was loud knocking at our door before a flood of girls poured into our room. We couldn't resist letting everyone hang out for a little while longer. The room was filled with love and not once was the language barrier an issue. Sitting on the bottom bed with two nine-year-old girls I'd become very close with, I noticed one of the girl's slippers. They were adorable, so I told her, "I love your shoes, Adriana! They are so cute!" She smiled from ear to ear, but then surprised me by running out of the room. A few moments later she returned holding something behind her back—the same pair of slippers she had on, but in blue.

She put them on my feet and said, "To remember me." I melted right there. These girls, who had so little, came rushing in and out of our room with anything they had, whether it was jewelry or a drawing, showing us how much we meant to them. Moments like these came often on the trip, and deepened my understanding that all you truly need is to love one another; it will go a long way. I'll always hold the Pro Vita community closely in my heart.





RYAN VUONO '20

My trip to Pro Vita Orphanage in Romania was an absolutely incredible experience, full of memories I'll never forget. Going into the trip, I really wasn't sure quite what to expect. The second we got off the bus, all the kids came running up to us, saying hello and giving us huge hugs. Within minutes, a huge game of soccer broke out. It amazed me how quickly we all connected with one other, despite the fact that we were older and came from a different place. These kids were so generous with their love and compassion, I instantly felt welcomed into their family.

One moment on the second day we were there encapsulated this feeling for me. We returned from stacking firewood at Pro Vita's other site as the kids came back from school. It was quickly decided that the game of the day would be team tag, boys vs. girls. As the girls finished counting down from 20 and ran towards us, one of the boys, Tao, asked if he could have a piggy back ride. When he hopped up on my back, he told me that he wanted to show me his secret hiding spot. As we ran from the girls, I let him steer me behind the main building using my ears. We managed to lose them, and Tao confided that he had never shown anyone his secret spot, until now. While this may seem like something small, I could tell that it obviously meant a great deal to him; he was so excited to share it with me. I'm so happy that I was able to go on that trip so that I could help give back to these special people who welcomed me so quickly and lovingly.

