

## An American in Ploiesti



*Who would have thought that a “100% American” would choose to work in dusty Ploiesti, and not as an employee of a multinational company, but as a simple Volunteer, paid with the monthly minimum wage?*

The Volunteer is, in fact, a 59 year old woman named Susan Safford, with a teaching background, who chose to give up her good pension in the US and to join Peace Corps, an entity set up in 1961 by President Kennedy with the aim of promoting American cultural values and especially to helping communities in poor countries implement social programs. At present, over 8,000<sup>1</sup> American Volunteers work in almost 80 countries. Susan Safford comes from Detroit and works with the Environmental Protection Agency, participating in many activities organized by the organization. “Why be a Volunteer?”- was the first question. “Why not be?” – was her response. “Volunteering represents an important part of our history. The first American army, for example, was formed by volunteers”. With a serene look and a broad smile, Susan declares herself as being absolutely delighted by Romanians and by their capacity of understanding. Somehow intrigued by her opinion, we start naming our weaknesses, but she graciously brushes over it with a wise reply: “You (Romanians<sup>2</sup>) are going to change, over time. You’ll become more responsible, more careful with the ones around you and more careful with the environment. I noticed your qualities, and I can state that I’ve rarely met people as helpful as people in Romania. You are so welcoming, willing to learn, and to share your culture and customs. I have, however, noticed that you actually have a minus: the lack of punctuality.” She helped organizing June activities related to the celebration of Environment Day and declared herself as being impressed by the ingenuity of children, who created very interesting art work with the environment as a theme. With her pedagogy background, Susan supports the Environmental Protection Agency in many awareness campaigns organized in schools. Susan Safford has three married children, and she keeps in touch with them daily, via e-mail. She arrived in Romania in May this year, but she still misses the lakes of her home land. She tells us about her town, the country of the American automobile industry, with giant parks where public green spaces do not have the same restrictions as in our country<sup>3</sup>. She still admits that Americans use cars extensively instead of walking, as she started practicing here, in Ploiesti. This summer,

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<sup>1</sup> Statistic amended from original article

<sup>2</sup> Translation note

<sup>3</sup> I think the reporter refers to the fact that you can walk on the grass in American parks, while in Romanian parks this is forbidden.

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Susan will join the EPA's employees and participate in the permanent children's camp organized in Bucov. Susan was very surprised by the people's habit of throwing away garbage on the street, and even more surprised by the fact that this behavior is not promptly sanctioned. However, she was delighted by the variety of nature in Romania: mountains, hills, plains, sea cost, all these existing in such a small country. We had the feeling, at the end of the discussion, that there are still plenty of things left to be told. But we were surprised to meet a person who sees us so differently from how we are used to being seen.