

*Our Mission:
Supporting improved
educational opportunities for
the children and youth of the
isolated Malësia e Madhe
region of Northern Albania*

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New Kindergarten Teacher in Vrith

On his recent trip to Albania, Steve walked a two-hour loop over the mountain from Vrith to the farming community of Razma. As he neared Razma, he passed a small derelict building with the remains of a concrete toilet behind it. He remembered this building from over twenty years ago. It looked like an animal shed but was, in fact, a primary school. He had encountered Lula, the teacher, who invited him into the school. It was one room, one tiny window,

an ill-fitting door. No stove. No electricity. No blackboard. One ratty table and several broken chairs.

“A primary school?” he asked incredulously.

“Yes, Lula said, “We have ten students in three grades.”

Steve asked what she needed and after a minute’s thought, she said, “A toilet. It doesn’t matter for boys, but some girls won’t come to school if there is no toilet.”

Steve paid for materials for both a toilet and an additional window. Lula’s brother volunteered to construct both.

Fortunately, this decrepit school was closed several years later, and the students were sent to the school in Vrith.

Fast-forward to 2025. The AAI-supported kindergarten in Vrith needed a teacher. On the recommendation of the head teacher, Nikoleta, a woman named Lula was hired. Steve was introduced to Lula in October when he was in Vrith, and she was the same Lula from twenty years ago! Cheek kisses and laughter all around.



Marin Malotaj



AAI has awarded Marin Malotaj a scholarship to attend ETSP Campus of Cachan for the current year. The school is a historical seventeen-acre campus located at Cachan, in the inner suburbs of Paris. “The program is designed to train engineers on a spacious campus where the most advanced technologies are combined with areas devoted to concentration and conviviality.” Marin will be working on his Masters in Engineering. We wish Marin the best of luck!

“I would like to sincerely thank you for all you have done for me. Your generous support of 2000 USD this year, together with the AAI scholarship that I have been fortunate to receive for the past four years, have made it possible for me to begin my studies in Paris. I am deeply grateful.”-Marin

From the President

I'm watching the sort-of controlled chaos of a hundred and fifty kids having a good time. There is a volleyball competition in progress, Tamara girls versus Dedaj girls. Albanians are fierce competitors. For the record, Tamara won. On the sidewalk in front of the school, younger kids are whooping it up competing at cornhole with equipment that AAI purchased. Upstairs in the Dedaj school, several former AAI scholarship students are judging artwork from Tamara, Dedaj, Vrith, and Zagora. And in another room, several teachers are checking the results of an English language competition. I'm circulating, enjoying the heck out of this AAI-sponsored competition and party. After the events at the school, we all traipse across the street to the ballroom above Palush's restaurant to enjoy a performance of girls in traditional costumes dancing to a young man playing a qiftele, an Albanian stringed instrument. Then soft drinks and cake all around. Another successful AAI-sponsored competition/party.

During my time in Albania in October, I also visited nearly all of "our" schools, met with administrators and teachers, got some photos with kindergartners, and was thanked over and over for providing kindergarten supplies. I met librarians, who thanked me for the AAI-provided library books. The Albania Ministry of Education supplies little to the kindergartens besides a building and teachers. It is such a joy to fill the gaps for these wonderful, dedicated individuals providing an education to village kids.

And it's only possible because of the generosity of our donors. Thank you.....*Steve Cook, President*



