Institute of Current World Affairs

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Fellows and their Activities

Adam Smith Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Christopher P. Ball. An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Shelly Renae Browning. A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology. [SOUTH ASIA]

Chenoa Egawa. An enrolled member of the Lummi Indian Nation, Chenoa is spending two years living among mesoAmerican Indians, studying successful and not-so-successful cooperative organizations designed to help the Indians market their manufactures, agricultural products and crafts without relying on middlemen. A former trade specialist for the American Indian Trade and Development Council of the Pacific Northwest, Chenoa's B.A. is in International Business and Spanish from the University of Washington in Seattle. [THE AMERICAS]

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Randi Movich. The current John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, Randi is spending two years in Guinea, West Africa, studying and writing about the ways in which indigenous women use forest resources for reproductive health. With a B.A. in biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and a Master of Science degree in Forest Resources from the University of Idaho, Randi is building on two years' experience as a Peace Corps agroforestry extension agent in the same region of Guinea where she will be living as a Fellow with her husband, Jeff Fields—also the holder of an Idaho Master's in Forest Resources. [sub-SAHARA]

Daniel B. Wright. A sinologist with a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, Dan's fellowship immerses him in southwest China's Guizhou Province, where he, his journalist-wife Shou Guowei, and their two children (Margaret and Jon) will base themselves for two years in the city of Duyun. Previously a specialist on Asian and Chinese affairs for the Washington consulting firm of Andreae, Vick & Associates, Dan also studied Chinese literature at Beijing University and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California. [EAST ASIA]

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LETTERS

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young professionals to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. An exempt operating foundation endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

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EUROPE/RUSSIA

Christopher P. Ball is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe.

An Introduction to Székelyudvarhely: Part One

BUDAPEST, Hungary May 1998

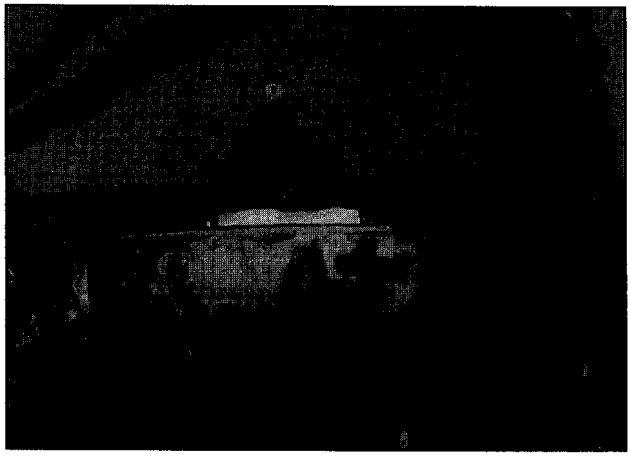
By Christopher P. Ball

SZÉKELYUDVARHELY[1]

Leaving the Hungarian-speaking Romanian town of Sighisoara and heading south, we enter one of the most beautiful regions of the Carpathian Mountains: Harghita county, Romania. The thick forest of evergreens smothers the view of the sky and opens itself only temporarily to allow a glimpse of the luscious country beyond the trees. As we descend along the mountain's winding road the forest slowly thins out and the road straightens again as we enter the Carpathian basin. Here, tucked comfortably away among farmers' fields and sparse trees, are several small villages still largely untouched by modernity and the communist regime. Old women in black with wrapped heads and wrinkled faces sit along the roadside chatting and watching each passing car. If we're arriving near dusk, horse-drawn carts of hay line the streets, bringing home the sweaty men and boys from nearby fields after a long day's work. This region is Székelyföld, home of the Székelys, a Hungarian-speaking people who live in this southeastern region of Transylvania.

Passing these villages with their small peasant houses and occasional churches, we near our destination, the town of Székelyudvarhely. On the right as we enter can be seen a large, hand-carved wooden sign announcing the town's name and welcoming visitors. Immediately thereafter, also on the right and just off the road, is one of Székelyudvarhely's oldest and most prized structures, the Jesus Heart Chapel. A small, four-leaf-clover-shaped building almost unnoticed at first, it marks the spot where legend claims the invading Tartars of the 13th century were stopped dead in their tracks by valiant Székely warriors. According to the legend the Székelys, stationed on a distant hilltop (nearly 10 miles away), saw the Tartars approaching and readied for battle. The Székely leader cried out to Jesus for guidance and with one great pull of his bowstring, released an arrow that found its target in the heart of the attacking Tartar leader. The leader was instantly killed and the remaining troops fled in fear. On the spot where the

[1] The town's name literally translates into English as the "Székely Place of the Court." This is perhaps because the town traditionally was the seat of the only court of appeals in all of Székelyföld and was the frequent place of noble meetings. Székelys are an ethnic group within the broader family of Hungarian-speaking people and Székelyföld is the eastern region of Transylvania where they live. Székelyföld today is made up of three counties: Covasna, Harghita (where Székelyudvarhely is located) and Mures. These three counties have the highest percentage in all of Romania of Hungarian-speakers (as a percent of total population). The word Székelyföld literally means "Székely Land." The town's name is pronounced: SAKE - a - ood - VAWR - hey (the first 'a' is like saying the letter in our alphabet 'a' and the second in 'VAWR' is like 'aw' in awful.



Jesus Heart Chapel

leader fell the Székelys built a modest white chapel in thanks to Jesus for his guiding hand. The chapel, with some renovation, still stands today and is one of the oldest chapels in the region.

Passing the Jesus Heart Chapel we enter the "communist part" of Székelyudvarhely. Here on both sides of the road are large block-apartments built during communism to house workers who were moved in from neighboring villages. They tower up, blocking our view of the surrounding hills and distant mountain peaks. They are all the same, monuments to the communist nightmare of days now gone. They flash by one after another as we quickly pass them, interested more in the city's historical riches that lie ahead.

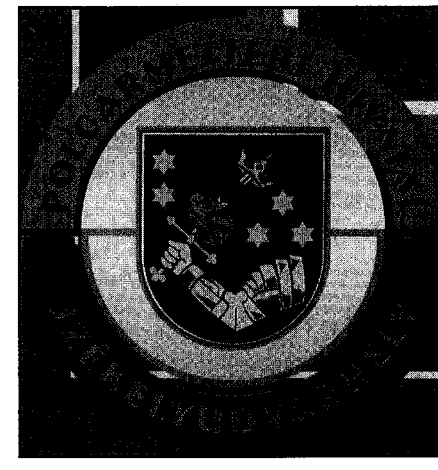
Just after the block apartments, the buildings flatten out again and have more of a 19th century look to them. Although these too are now run down by age and lack of maintenance, each at least has its own character that still manages to shine through despite the layers of time on their facades. They are small, square edifices similar to those found in the Hungarian and Austrian countryside, reflecting the long Austro-Hungarian influence on the town. Most are of stucco painted yellow or white and today house shops and a few families.

The cluster of these historical buildings soon opens up, revealing the heart of Székelyudvarhely, the town square. From where we enter (from the south) we can see the Town Hall (built in 1829) directly across the square. It is a large, official-looking building with the Székelyudvarhely coat of arms as the centerpiece on the entrance side of the building. Between us and the town hall is an oblong green court running east to west and encircled by the road and pedestrian walkways. In the court are benches, well-trimmed bushes and a large water fountain built in true communist style with gray, masculine, grim-faced figures swinging oversized hammers at some unseen object. Also in the square and almost unnoticed at first is the statue of Balázs Orbán, "the Greatest Székely" about whom I will have more to say later (see Part II).

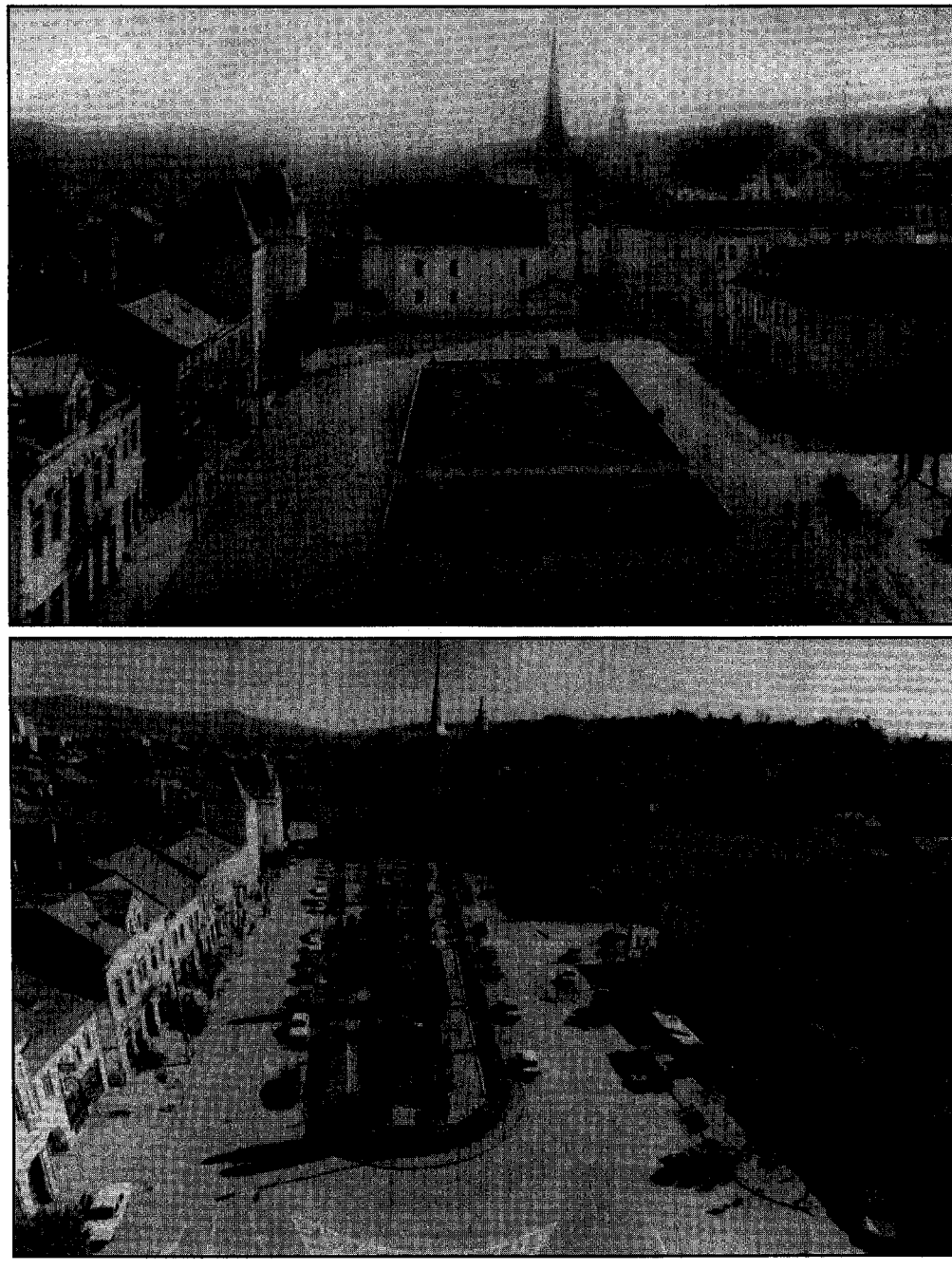
The Town Hall (while attractive), the Balázs Orbán statue (while important), and the water fountain (while communist), are not however the things that dominate the square. Standing at the western end of the square, and at a 45-degree angle to our right, is the massive Reformed Church, imposing itself on all present. The Reformed Church, built in 1781, is distinguished from the surrounding last-century, classicist buildings by its clearly baroque architectural style. This church and the large Catholic Church (built in 1793) at the opposite end of the square stand today as reminders of Székelyudvarhely's long history of religious tolerance.

The relationship between Protestants and Catholics in Székelyudvarhely has always been a peaceful and cooperative one. Both faiths established primary schools and colleges in the town and thereby greatly contributed to the town's intellectual and cultural development. Today

Town Hall (Blaázs Orbán statue, right)



Town Coat of Arms



More-or-less identical views of the Town Square (Yesterday, top, and Today, bottom)

there are 20,496 Catholics (51.5 percent of the total population) and 12,067 Protestants (30.3 percent).[2] Because of the schools and colleges, a rarity in the region for centuries,[3] the town has been known as a "School Town" since 1539 when the Jesuit Gergely Marosvásárhelyi founded the Áron Tamási Licium.[4] Today it still stands, watching over the town from a hilltop just to the east of the town square.

Székelyudvarhely is a town with a rich history, which we are about to explore. Today, however, it is probably best known because it has the highest percentage of eth-

[2] In addition, there are 775 Greek Catholics and 622 locals of "other religions."

[3] Most cities had only primary schools usually covering grades one to four or, at most, one to eight.

[4] This is its post-communist name. Mr. Áron was a famous Székely writer around the turn of the century who wrote many books, poems and essays. He is most famous, however, for his books about a young Székely named Ábel and his adventures in the region. Unique in his writing is that he fully exploits the Székely's Hungarian dialect in a manner similar to, say, Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus Tales of the South, although Áron's works are not children's stories.

Áron Tamás Catholic High School

nic Hungarians (for a town its size) in all of Romania. The town's current population (based on 1992 statistical data) totals 39,801, of which 97.4 percent are Hungarian-speakers. Locals claim that this is the highest percentage of Hungarian-speakers in a town this size in the entire world, but I'm not sure about that. The Székelys have been known to exaggerate on occasion.

A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF SZÉKELYUDVARHELY

Judged by archaeological findings in the area, it is clear that the region where Székelyudvarhely is located has been inhabited since the Neolithic Era. In the 2nd century BC it was inhabited by Roman soldiers who established a military camp in the area.

When exactly the Romans left and the Székelys arrived is not known, so we cannot say for sure when the city of Székelyudvarhely was founded.

The town is first mentioned in a document dated 1224 and appears for the first time in the papal register in 1333. The only remnant of that era is the Jesus Heart Chapel mentioned above.

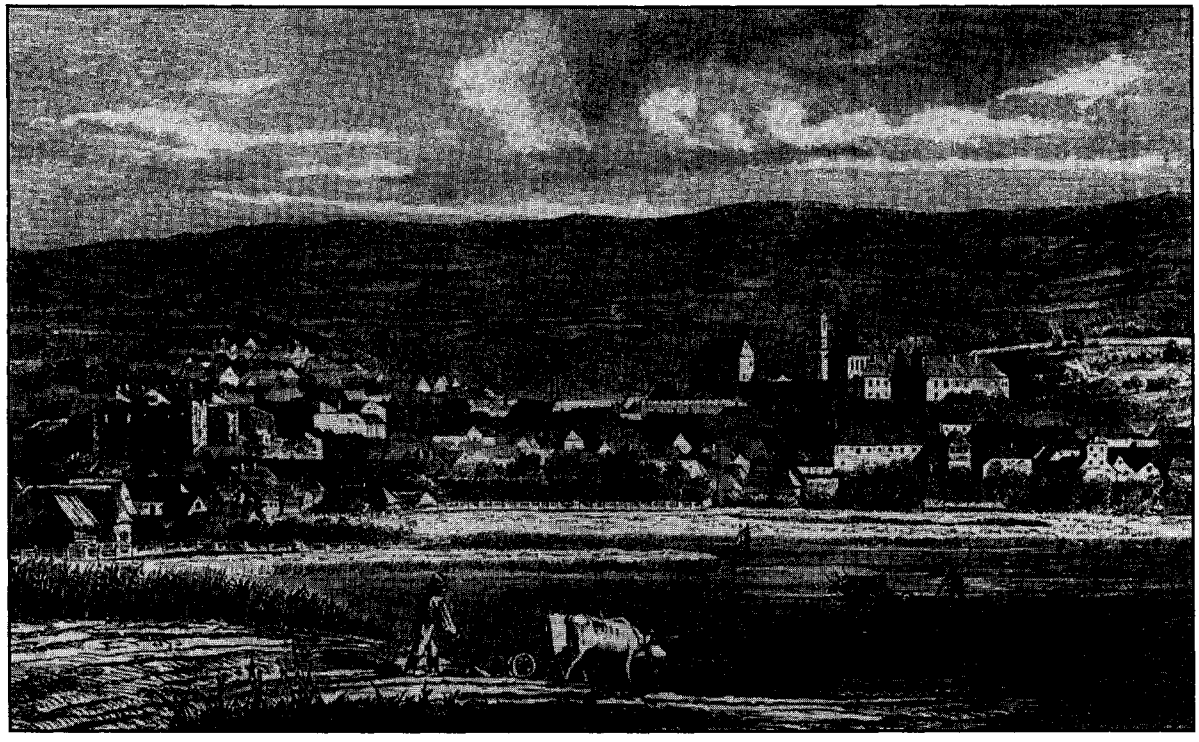
By the 15th century, Székelyudvarhely had developed into a market town. The area around it was rich in natural resources (agriculture, forests and salt) that could be traded with others in the region. By the 16th century the town had developed a merchant class that began and continued to establish guilds. During this period the town expanded rapidly and annexed three neighboring villages (Gyárosfalva in 1572, Szentimrefalva in 1577 and Ciberfalva in 1620), adding to Székelyudvarhely's population and production potential. The regional importance of the town at this time can be seen from the fact that the district where the town is located was called the "mother district of the Székely districts" because it contained Székelyudvarhely, which in turn was the home of the court of appeals for Székelyföld from 1505 to 1562.

By the beginning of the 18th century the town had been worn down by wars and devastating plagues (1708-1712 and 1717-1720). But the city then recovered and many of its Baroque monuments were built: the Franciscan Church and Nunnery (from 1712-1779), the Reformed Church (1780-1781) and the Catholic Church (1787-1793). Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries the town bloomed. The guilds expanded in power and number. During this time the network of streets was developed and the Town Hall was built (1828-1829). Many of the streets were then paved and between 1828 and 1831 the town center began to take its modern shape.

After the 1848 Revolution, which was fed by some of the town's human and other resources, Székelyudvarhely resumed its development. The guild system was officially liquidated in 1872 and the first factories appeared. Also at this time many cultural societies and clubs were formed and the school network was further enlarged. This was the decisive stage of the town's embourgeoisement and urbanization, which in turn finalized the look of today's downtown.

THE 20TH CENTURY

In the early part of this century Székelyudvarhely



Drawing of Historic Székelvdvarhely

began to solidify its local industrial base — until it was hit by two World Wars. These led to a decline in the local population and to the town's falling under control of the Romanian state in 1920 and the communist regime from 1948 until 1989.

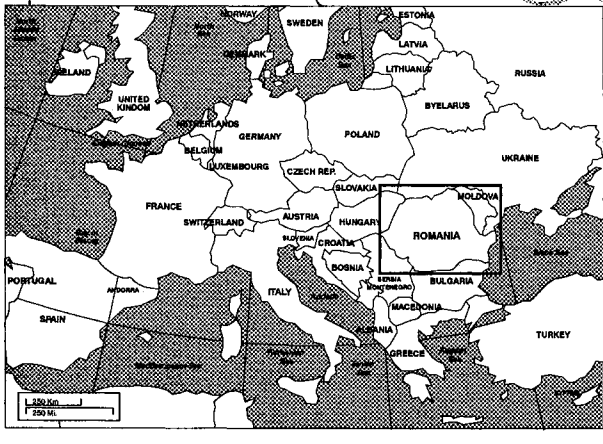
After 1960, all city development took the form of communist-established manufacturing. The three main industries established in Székelyudvarhely were machine-manufacturing, food-processing, and wood-furniture. In addition, one of the largest thread factories in Romania was built. The local labor force, however, was insufficient. As a result, families from surrounding villages and other areas of Romania were forced to move into Székelyudvarhely to work in the new factories.[5] This boosted the local population to four times its pre-communist size, which naturally led to a housing shortage. The communists met this shortage by building five new districts in the city and filling them with block-apartment housing. During the remaining 30-odd years of communism Székelyudvarhely suffered the same fate (general shortages of goods, food rationing, irrational investment, etc.) as most other Romanian towns under the economic and social direction of the brilliant Nicolae Ceasescu, who made Romania the great world economic power it is today.

POST-COMMUNISM

After Ceasescu's ouster in 1989, Székelyudvarhely embarked on a new path of development, competing in Romania for foreign investors and trying to develop its own local economy. It is still helped in these efforts by its high level of education. It maintained its well-developed network of schools throughout the communist period. A highly educated population is an advantage in attracting foreign investors because they often have to spend less to train local workers. Important as well are the manufacturing skills developed by workers in the communist-founded factories. The skills demanded today are not always the same, but are often easily learned by those with prior manufacturing experience. It has also proved beneficial that the town's population is large enough to form a decent-sized local market in Romania. This has given Székelyudvarhely a chance to develop some local industries, thereby sustaining itself to some extent (something smaller villages are unable to do), and provides enough local-market demand to encourage other Romanian businesses to locate there.

Today, Székelyudvarhely is Harghita County's second largest city (Csíkszereda is the largest) and contains 20.9 percent of the county's economic units (*i.e.* limited companies and joint-stock companies). In addition it has received over 40 percent of the county's foreign capital inflow. The average net wage in Székelyudvarhely today is around 567,647 Lei/month (about U.S.$66), but this figure is inflated because the population is small and there are a few high-salaried entrepreneurs. The mayor's office estimates that the average "middle-class" citizen earns less than the official monthly minimum wage of 250,000

[5] Some argue that this was also an attempt by the Romanian government to move ethnic Romanians into the town to lower the percentage of ethnic Hungarians living there.



Lei/month (about U.S.$29).[6] The town's active working population is 22,671 persons with around 670 unemployed (about three percent of the active labor force).

One final determinant working in Székelyudvarhely's favor is that since 1996 it has had an excellent mayor, Mr. Jenô Szász. Mayor Szász is young, energetic and works with local businesspersons, experts and foreign advisors to develop Székelyudvarhely for the 21st century. Currently he has three major targets for the town: to form industrial parks and encourage foreign direct investment; to establish a better local service sector to serve both the local population and those foreign investors who come or are already present; and to push forward the privatization of all the large industries created in Székelyudvarhely under communism.

A FEW BRIEF REMARKS

In general, when I talk to local government officials and businesspersons I get the feeling that the town is going in the right direction. Much of the town's positive development does seem to depend on the initiatives of the mayor, but the town's access to abundant natural resources doesn't hurt. It should be noted as well that Székelyudvarhely is the first town I have ever visited as a Fellow that has accurate up-to-date statistics (or, as accurate as possible in Romania) and modern, colorful brochures (in English, Hungarian and Romanian languages) that they give to potential investors and tourists. Furthermore, these are produced with local government money and funds raised from the local business community. This should be seen in comparison to other cities (Auid, for example) where the local government's economist not only couldn't quote statistics, or explain the town's development strategy, but didn't even know what an "average wage" was. In this light, Székelyudvarhely is truly remarkable and gives me great hope for the future of Székelyföld at least, if not for all of Romania as well — assuming other towns eventually follow suit. ❑

[6] In both cases here I use an exchange rate of 8,600 Lei to the Dollar.

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Whitney Mason.

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called The *Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the *Vladivostok News* and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam. **[EUROPE/RUSSIA]**

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Jean Benoît Nadeau.

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization." **[EUROPE/RUSSIA]**

Susan Sterner.

A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border; in 1998 she was a co-nominee for a Pulitzer Prize for a series on child labor. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women. **[THE AMERICAS]**

Tyrone Turner.

A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced international photo-essays on such topics as Rwandan genocide and mining in Indonesia (the latter nominated for a Pulitzer). As an ICWA Fellow he is writing and photographing Brazilian youth and their lives in rural and urban settings. **[THE AMERICAS]**

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