

# AFTER THE FALL

## HIV GROWS UP

### The Timeline

ROMANIA 1989 - 2011

#### 1988

The first cases of HIV show up in orphanages and hospitals in Constanta County, Romania. Health care workers are forbidden to report on the cases or identify them as AIDS.



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#### March 1989

In March of 1989, thirty-two children die in one month in an orphanage in Constanta County.

#### December 1989

Communist Dictator Nicolai Ceaușescu and his wife Elena are captured and killed by firing squad during the violent Revolution that ended a 24 year totalitarian regime.



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#### 1989-1995

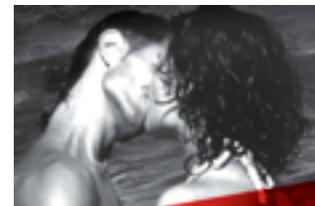
Over 12,000 Romanian children are infected with HIV in state run hospitals and orphanages through transfusions of contaminated blood.

#### 2002

UNAIDS risk analysis presented at the Bucharest Conference shows that Romania is at high risk for an expanded HIV/AIDS epidemic. The majority of the infected children who have survived are reaching adolescence.

#### 2011

Over 7000 of the infected children are long term survivors and a new set of problems emerges for these young people looking for independence, jobs, wanting to date and start their own families.



## SYNOPSIS

### After the Fall, HIV Grows Up

offers an intimate portrait of a group of teens and young adults in Romania. They are the long-term survivors of the pediatric HIV/AIDS epidemic that swept Romania in the late 80s and early 90s as Nicolai Ceausescu's communist dictatorship and reign of terror came to an end. Over 12,000 cases of HIV infection among children were recorded.

They contracted the virus mainly in state run hospitals and orphanages where they had been abandoned by parents who were encouraged to leave their children in the care of the communist state when they could not afford to look after them.

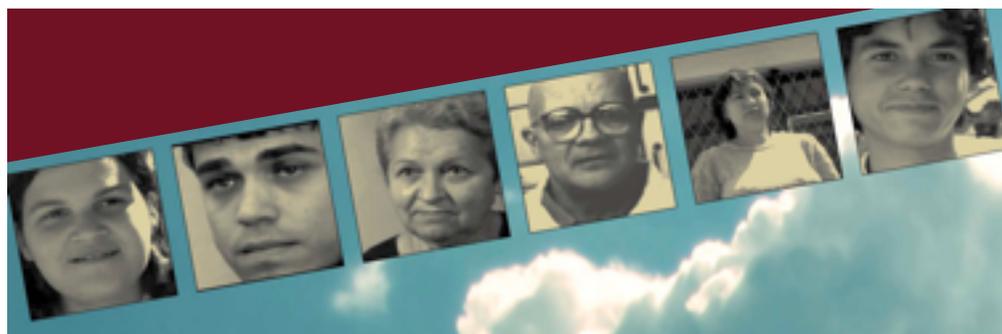
Strange medical practices and outdated blood screening policies in these state

run institutions, combined with the overcrowding brought on by the extreme hardships people faced under Ceausescu's communist dictatorship, precipitated this crisis.

This documentary takes a look at what happened: the difficult history, the caregivers response, and the issues and challenges these kids face as they come of age. They want to integrate into society, marry, have families and embark on successful careers. They are survivors with a variety of stories to tell that are both heartbreaking and triumphant.

These young people face uncertainty based on the difficulties of navigating a system that isn't entirely prepared for them to be adults.

Their journey offers drama and disappointment and many lessons for a global community that will certainly face large populations of HIV infected children around the world who will be long-term survivors. From children who had no voice, to young adults with a message to share, this is the story of "childhood" HIV in Romania.





*These HIV positive young people live in a group home that was founded in 1990 to serve children who had been abandoned by their parents at the hospitals. Foreign aid funded the majority of these homes and programs.*

Filmed on location in Constanta and Bucharest, Romania over the course of two years the documentary features an amazing cast. The young people and the caregivers, the journalists, and activists, all of them fighting for continued access to treatment and to have lives that the young people call “normal.”

The documentary tackles the macro subject of HIV infection among young people, by looking at a micro population of HIV positive teens who have grown up together in a group home in Constanta County in Romania. In many ways they are the fortunate, as they have been cared for through the hard work and dedication of doctors like Dr. Rodica Matusa, nurses like Venera Botescu, foundations, and NGOs like World Vision.

Many of their infected counterparts have not been so fortunate. Over 5000 died.

In an interview with Eduard Petrescu, UNAIDS, Country Advisor in Romania, he warns that as these young people grow up they are at risk for becoming a vulnerable group. And that they have to overcome discrimination, the residual effects of under-education and in some cases over-protection in order to integrate successfully as adults into Romanian society.

They are trying to find ways to support themselves, and struggling with side-effects from the medications, battling to stay healthy and dealing with all of the challenges that any 20 year old has.

Ashica, Mioara and Georgie are three friends who have shared these hardships from the time they were babies. They have grown up together, learned to cope with their situation and have all embarked on the tenuous path to

independence and adulthood. This is their story and the story of the many young people we talked to who did not want to have their identities revealed for fear that they might lose their jobs, their housing or harm their loved ones.

The backdrop to their story is the legacy of Communism and the people who have worked so hard to make their lives possible After the Fall.

The legacy of their story is the possibility of long and healthy independent lives.



**Ashica & Mioara and Georgie**