

Issue 19, June 2018



ACS ALUMNI Magazine

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Featuring
Ann Ferren and Avis Bohlen
Nikolay Georgiev '44
Theodora Konetsovska '97
Ivan Ivanov '18







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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Alumni and Friends of ACS,

The concept for a unifying campus center that would marry new ideas for educational environments with the neo-classical look of the campus was compelling to begin with, and after years of planning and construction it has been brilliantly executed. We now have a building complex that not only fits the campus and the times, but also we believe will be enduring in both form and function. And architecturally, I believe it reflects the educational approach of ACS – that is, a healthy tension between respect for the tried and true of traditional methods and an eagerness to innovate and explore new and better ways of teaching and learning. We look forward to a long and purposeful life for the America for Bulgaria Campus Center, which shines now like a bright jewel in the ACS crown.



You will find inspirational remarks by Americans and Bulgarians on display throughout the Campus Center. For the main foyer of Ostrander, we chose the hymn to Cyril and Methodius and a quotation taken from the South Wall of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, DC. “We shall overcome,” said Dr. King, “because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” “March on O People resurrected,” reads the hymn, “to a bright future march on. With literacy, this new power, your fate you shall revive.” Thanks to the courage and dedication of so many, we have resurrected ourselves as a school since our re-opening in 1992. And thanks to so many who have supported and been involved with this project, we will confidently march on to a bright future, counting on our students and our graduates, now and in the future, to help bend the long arc of the moral universe towards truth as well as justice. Our community joins together to thank all the many generous people and organizations who have given of their time and talent as well as their treasure: trustees, faculty & staff, families, friends, and alumni; the America for Bulgaria Foundation; the American Embassy; the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) Program; the architectural, construction, and many professional companies that worked together to produce the magnificent new and renovated facilities; and also all of our students, who with patience, understanding, good humor, and determination have gone about the business of schooling while our campus has been a long-term construction site.

The outstanding leadership of the Class of 2018, in particular, helped us not just to survive the lengthy construction process of the Campus Center, but to thrive. And we are confident that our newest graduates will continue to thrive as they move on to the exciting futures that lie ahead. What a great class we have had to lead us through this period of transition at ACS: exceptional scholars, artists, athletes, debaters, performers, thinkers, doers... in short, strong people and good leaders as well as outstanding students. Their contributions as a community as well as individuals have reflected strong character and care for others as well as commitment, determination, resilience, and perseverance. We thank them as well as congratulate them for all they have accomplished during their ACS years. Please join me in welcoming the Class of 2018 as ACS alumni!

With appreciation and best wishes,

Richard T. Ewing, Jr., Ed.D.
President, American College of Sofia

ACS Alumni Magazine

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Petia Ivanova '97

Dear Alumni,

Welcome to Issue 19 of the ACS Alumni Magazine!

Do you remember spring on campus? It's upon us again and it's beautiful. As ever. We can't wait to welcome you back for the upcoming Arts Fest, this year combined with the alumni reunion for Classes 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013!

There's nothing like the interview my dear classmate and friend of 1997 Theodora Konetsovska did with her fellow trustees Ann Ferren and Avis Bohlen on their Radcliffe College experience from the late 1950's, to remind us that change - in how women are treated - is here indeed. And the way to make sure that it stays and that we continue in the right direction, is to keep questioning "the way things are." Something tells me we can count on you, in all your corners of this world, for that!

I started the piece on Nikolay Georgiev, Class of 1944, somewhere in March 2016 and only got to publish it in print now - there aren't nearly enough alum mag pages around to tell the beauty and turmoil of the lives of the fascinating people that walked this campus' grounds many decades ago, got in fights, fretted over exams, and fell in love as we did. And when we imminently lose these people, - like we just recently did with sweet Liliana Ikonopisova, Class of 1942, - we have the gripping stories and the inspiration they provide to hold on to.

Going from one humble and graceful person to the next: it was such a delight to talk to newly graduated Ivan Ivanov, Class of 2018, winner of countless medals and distinctions in several disciplines. In spite of a crazy May schedule packed with festivities and *matura* exams in equal measures, Ivan showed up, spoke straightforward, - these two more than enough to build rapport with this editor, - and then even met all of my interview-related requests, on time. A delight, indeed. I look forward to all his future accomplishments!

Before she joined the ACS Board of Trustees in 2012, I hadn't seen Theodora Konetsovska, Teddy as I call my 1992-93 school year accidental roommate, in over 15 years. How lovely that we now get to meet every year; how great it feels to be sharing this new side of ACS life together, to once again put heads together, worry and, of course, laugh together. This girl can do away with any-number-of-years gap with just one of her jokes - as you are about to find out for yourselves in her address to the graduates of 2018 - and the playful raise of her eyebrow is just one of the ways she can make anyone smile in an instant.

Not only spring is upon us here at ACS, so is preparation for GDPR compliance. We would love it if you didn't mind us continuing to share information with you in the future - sending our publications, telling you about school events, news, and ways to support ACS. Remember that invisible thread connecting us all and worth plenty? Let's keep it alive and make it stronger, come GDPR or high water! Let's stay in touch!

Much love,

Petia Ivanova '97

Ann Ferren and Avis Bohlen, Two Harvard-Radcliffe Alumnae at Lamont

Interview and introduction by Theodora Konetsovska '97

The ACS board of trustees meets twice a year, in the US in the fall and in Sofia in spring/summer. This past October, I had the privilege of hosting the board in Cambridge, Massachusetts where my fellow trustees and I got together with a lively, enthusiastic group of ACS alumni studying or settled in the Boston area. We also took advantage of Harvard University's campus to hold our two-day meetings. I thought it would be enjoyable for three of our members to be back on campus of their "alma mater" – Dick Ewing and Ann Ferren are alumni of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, while Ann and Avis Bohlen graduated from Radcliffe College. I was in for a huge surprise, however, when I learned that the building we met in had been off limits for Ann and Avis while they were students here (1957-1961). Lamont Library, one of Harvard's wonderful and rich libraries, in existence since 1949 and centrally located on the Harvard Yard, was a men's only facility until 1967.

On that October morning, Ann and Avis set foot in Lamont for the first time many years after graduating, while students (boys *and* girls) absent-mindedly passed by to bury themselves in the stacks or cradle their laptops in the comfy lounge. I felt a bit emotional. Our two terrific board members, part of an amazing, almost half-female board, had stood witness to momentous social changes in a few short decades. What I was taking for granted that morning – and had for my entire college career (my own college became co-ed in 1970) – was a very recent privilege, and a hard-earned one. I thought it would be fantastic to hear Ann's and Avis's thoughts on this "Lamont experience." I'm so glad I asked – here are their amazing stories and perspectives.



Ann Ferren and Avis Bohlen at Lamont Library, Harvard

What brought you to Harvard-Radcliffe as a student and when was that?

Ann Ferren: My parents, both academics, wanted me to go to the best possible college so I applied to Smith, Wellesley, Stanford, and Radcliffe. My brother was at Harvard and convinced me that I would not like going to a women's college and Stanford seemed too far away. So I left Minnesota in 1957 and when I graduated did not return. Radcliffe was really co-ed but not co-equal I learned.

Avis Bohlen: I was a student at Radcliffe from 1957 to 1961. Although I applied to several colleges, Radcliffe was always my first choice; I never seriously considered any others. I was drawn by the prospect of a Harvard education, supposedly the best the U.S. had to offer. (Radcliffe was formally a separate institution, but we had all our classes with Harvard students). I liked the idea of a co-ed school as well as an urban environment. I had friends at Radcliffe, I had been to secondary school in the Boston area and knew Cambridge well.

What are your fondest memories of your school days in Cambridge?

Ann: For the fun part I loved rehearsals of the Boston Symphony, Hasty Pudding shows, Mocha Almond ice cream, and dating. Academically, I struggled in advanced chemistry and calculus and then surprised myself when I had the courage to drop science. I was the only person in my family not a scientist. I chose economics on a whim. Some great courses, faculty, and my senior thesis confirmed it was the right choice.

Avis: My fondest memories are of the friends I made, the intellectual stimulus of Harvard, the pleasures of Cambridge (among them, sadly now defunct: Elsie's delicatessen, the Brattle Street theater, which

showed Humphrey Bogart movies all during exam period). Skiing trips to New Hampshire and Vermont; summer excursions to the beach. The cultural riches of Boston – the Boston Symphony, the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum. More than anything, I was – am – grateful for the intellectual richness of Harvard. I majored in Russian History and Literature and had wonderful professors, among them James Billington, later Librarian of Congress, whose course on the intellectual history of 19th century

“My brother at Harvard had his room cleaned and no work requirements. At Radcliffe we all had to wait on tables, answer phones, and take care of our own rooms.

Russia inspired me to change my major, and the eminent historian Richard Pipes. These were precious years of continual intellectual discovery.

The place you're standing at in that picture – Lamont Library – was accessible only to male students. Were there other academic facilities that were gender-segregated? Did that feel strange to you at the time, was it explained / rationalized in any way or was it just “the way things are”? Did female students rebel against it in your day?

Ann: Many of the inequities were “just the way things are.” My brother at Harvard had his room cleaned and no work requirements – any work in the houses was paid and for scholarship students. At Radcliffe we all had to wait on tables, answer phones, and take care of our own rooms. My father died in November of my freshman year and Harvard immediately gave my brother full financial aid – Radcliffe had only \$200 for me and I took it without complaint. Equally important, many

of the economics reading materials were only on reserve in Lamont – again rather than complain, I found a Harvard student who would give me his notes and study with me. Fortunately, I chose the right person as he became an economics professor at Northwestern. All the parietal rules of being in by 10, not being able to study in a man's room or have male visitors in your own room seem so old-fashioned. The one time I studied at a graduate student's apartment I worried for days that I would be expelled. In retrospect, I am shocked that I did not think I should speak up. President Bunting arrived my senior year and told us to stop being such sheep!

Avis: It was definitely a strange feeling to be able to walk into Lamont Library for the ACS Board meeting last fall; it was off-limits to female students in the years I was at Radcliffe. I felt I was finally penetrating the holy of holies! Harvard in those years was definitely the richer, more privileged institution; Radcliffe the poor relation. The boys' accommodations in the Harvard houses were much nicer and more spacious than our shoe-box rooms in the Radcliffe dorms. We had to wait on tables and clean our own rooms; no work was required of the boys. And our strict parietal rules seem incredible today. We were not allowed to have men in our rooms at any time of day or to go to the boys' rooms or to stay out past a certain hour, I think 11 p.m. We accepted these restrictions as the order of things, “the way things are,” without, I am sorry to say, too much questioning. The rebels came later. At the time, most of us felt we were exceptionally fortunate to be at Harvard, not least of all because it was a co-ed institution – very much the exception in the late 1950's. And though I could not use Lamont, I was able to obtain a stack pass for Widener Library which allowed me to explore its riches at will. Are

undergraduates still allowed that kind of access today?

Did your academic studies at Radcliffe relate to your professional work later or did you go in a different direction? What do you do now?

Ann: I married after I graduated and had one year in Cambridge while my husband finished law school. I wanted to get a Master's degree in economics but that would take two years so I settled for a Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I never thought I would teach but loved it and taught high school economics before going back to get a doctorate in education. My career has been in higher education with lots of emphasis on curriculum development and faculty development. Although I continued to teach, I spent over 30 years as an academic administrator. My economics training was essential as higher education has never been an efficient operation and never had enough money to accomplish all its good ideas. When I retired, I became a senior fellow with the Association of American Colleges and Universities running projects, writing, and consulting.

Avis: Ultimately, yes. When I graduated from Radcliffe, however, I had no clear idea of what I wanted to do next nor was I committed to a professional career. In those days, life-long careers were not the norm for most women.

Only a dedicated handful went on to become doctors, lawyers, academics; the rest of us imagined we would work for a time, then marry and have kids, then resume some kind of professional activity. How the world has changed! A graduate degree was the default option for me as for many. After working in Washington, D.C. for two years, I went to Columbia University intending to get a Ph.D. but then left after acquiring the M.A. After five years working at an



A Radcliffe professor teaches a lecture in the business administration program, circa 1954, Image via Schlesinger Library

academic institute in Paris, where my father was Ambassador, I returned to Washington and ended up at the State Department where I served for twenty-five years as a career diplomat. My Harvard-Radcliffe education served me well: the best preparation for the practice of diplomacy, in my view, is a knowledge of history. My focus on Russia proved useful during the Cold War years; I participated on several occasions in arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union. But more important than any specific expertise, my Harvard-Radcliffe education gave me the tools to think and analyze and question.

Since retiring, I have taught at Georgetown, worked part-time for the State Department, and

ever really leaves Bulgaria. You will want a reason to come back often.” He was right!

Avis: I first came in touch with ACS when I was Ambassador to Bulgaria (1996-1999). ACS had only recently regained control of the Simeonovo property and was still encountering many problems with the government. Jim Clayton, then Chairman of the Board, now sadly deceased, approached me for help and we worked closely together in resolving them. (My favorite: ACS wished to take back a small building on the property that housed the telephone exchange of the Police Academy, now Building 5. When the Ministry of Interior resisted, we

imagined the building must house all kinds of secret listening devices. But when I went to call on the Minister, he confessed rather shame-facedly that the telephone system was so antiquated that it would collapse if it was moved. Could the

American Embassy provide help with a new telephone system? The Embassy could and did, and the College regained control of the building.)

I really fell in love with ACS – its history, the link that it symbolized between the United States and Bulgarian education, the beautiful campus. In those years, it was by no means certain that ACS would be able to survive. It was a very challenging

“ In those days, life-long careers were not the norm for most women. Only a dedicated handful went on to become doctors, lawyers, academics.”

served on a number of Boards and Commissions. Currently I am writing a biography of my father, diplomat Charles E. Bohlen.

How did you become engaged with ACS?

Ann: I served five years as Provost at the American University in Bulgaria. When I resigned, Sol Polansky, former Ambassador and member of the ACS Board, asked me to join the Board saying, “You know, no one

time in Bulgaria, students had no money and it was often difficult for them to attend the school but the dedication of that first generation of students was truly inspiring. In the climate of that period, I think the newly resurrected College stood for something very meaningful – academic excellence certainly, but all the values of a liberal American education as well. It was a great privilege to be asked to address the first graduating class in 1997. I think of the ACS graduates from those early years, the late 1990's, as the heroic generation and am happy to see so many of them serving on our Board today.

What do you enjoy most about your current responsibilities as a board member?

Ann: There is a sense of community and shared purpose when we meet. It is a privilege to serve with so many Board members who have deep and long connections to the College. Making decisions about the future in the context of the history and traditions of ACS makes the work especially meaningful. The opportunities we have to be with students are always refreshing and uplifting.

Avis: Jim Clayton knew my attachment to ACS and asked me to join the Board in 2003, the year after I retired. I have served on the Board ever since and it has been a wonderful and rewarding experience. The Board, like the school itself, has changed. In 2003, there were no Bulgarians on the Board and all Board meetings were held in the U.S. (an inevitable consequence of the many years that ACS existed only in its U.S.-based Board). Today, I am thankful to say, we benefit enormously from the participation and dedication of our Bulgarian members, including several recent ACS graduates whose first-hand experience of the College is invaluable. I enjoy being on the Board because of the commitment of my fellow Trustees as well as the collegiality and sense of common purpose that characterize our work together. Last but not least, the



ACS Board of Trustees members, ACS President Dr. Richard Ewing, and AFAC Chair Georgi Klissurski '10 at their gathering in Cambridge, October 2017

contact we have with the students every year when we come to Bulgaria, often at graduation, is a continuing source of inspiration.

What would you tell young ACS women today for whom doors may not be officially closed due to gender differences?

Ann: *"Don't ask permission."*

Volunteer, give away your time, do what you think is important and enjoy it. If others appreciate what you do or are willing to pay you for it, so much the better. The amazing thing to me has always been that you get back far more than you give.

"Say yes and worry later."

Recognize opportunities to do more and make a difference. When asked, don't worry about whether you have the right credentials or know how to do it.

"Keep learning outside your field."

Every year I was at American University (in Washington, D.C.) I audited a course for free. Over time I had developed a foundation in human resources, law, finance, technology, and more. All of it paid off when new projects and positions came up.

Avis: At the risk of sounding condescending, I would begin by saying that as women they are lucky to live now. There were few women

in the U.S. Foreign Service when I joined and even fewer in the top ranks; until very recently, women had been required to resign on marriage. Today the opportunities for women are infinitely more numerous and more varied; women represent nearly half the entering class of U.S. diplomats. Balancing family and work will always be a challenge for women but for many women in my generation, it was either or; today, businesses and institutions are infinitely more flexible and supportive. Having said that, it seems to me that the challenges and pressures facing young people today are enormous. They face a highly competitive world that lives on a 24/7 cycle, where jobs are not easily come by and cannot be taken for granted.

In short, every generation faces its own set of challenges. ACS graduates are better equipped than most to take them on. In the final analysis, the life-long challenge is to live up to your potential, always to test the limits of your capabilities – you can almost always achieve more and go farther than you think at the outset. And take advantage of opportunities as they come along if it is something that appeals to you. My biggest regrets in life are the things I did not do when I had the chance, usually for some paltry reason.

Nikolay Georgiev '44, The Humble Class President

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

It wasn't difficult to persuade Nikolay Georgiev to put time aside and share some of his memories from the old college days with me. However, as the agreed-upon day for my visit approached, he called me a few times to "warn" me that his life wasn't that worthy of attention, that his memories were merging into one another and fading, that it would be difficult to separate and put events in chronological order. Wouldn't I be disappointed? I knew from previous experience that there was no way the story of an American College graduate who has lived through three very different time periods would disappoint me and indeed, on the unusually warm March day of our interview, I left his cozy flat on the beautiful pedestrian part of Vitosha Blvd. anything but disappointed. I was grateful and immersed in thoughts. Nikolay Georgiev turned out to be an unnecessarily humble former class president and valedictorian who became a long-standing translator of "humanitarian" prose – as he called it – in three(!) different languages. What makes us so stubbornly refuse to be called "artists" if we aren't Picasso, I asked myself. After all, isn't translating diligently the creative work of others to another language, wary of keeping the richness of the original, creative work in itself, and isn't one who does it well an artist?



My Father, Foreign Languages, and the College

My father was a merchant. He mainly imported toiletries, cosmetics, and shaving accessories from Germany. He was the one who insisted that I study foreign languages. I got my primary and junior high school education at the German School, then I studied at the American

College. It was an obsession of my father's that I study foreign languages because he himself didn't know any and regretted it; it was as if he wanted to fill this gap through me. At work, he had an assistant of German origin that he traveled everywhere with, like the Leipzig Fair they went to twice per year. Sometimes my mother, who spoke French, joined him and twice he

took me as his translator. One of those trips took place shortly after I had started studying at the College, so we asked the director's permission for missing classes as it was after the start of the school year.

As a merchant, my father traveled all around the country by train before the war, carrying suitcases full of samples. In fact, he built this very

building. We moved in right before the bombings on 10 January 1944 and we had to evacuate it soon after that. We were able to return only after 9 September 1944.

In 1938, 60 boys and 40 girls entered the College. The families of most of the students were well-off. The tuition fee was 24,000 leva per year. There were students on scholarships like Chocho, who rang the bell, or the students working in the cafeteria. There were many Jewish students and, in spite of the whole Bulgarian chest-thumping for having saved all our Jews during WWII, there



Nikolay in the 1940 Yearbook

was a perceivably negative attitude in the country towards Jews while the war lasted. Whether it was a state order, I don't remember, but Jews did wear stars here, as well, and some were forced out of their homes. On account of the families of College students of Jewish origin leaving the country, the size of our class decreased significantly during the war.

I recall being the class president, like a representative, in second form. I was chosen solely for my excellent grades but, let me tell you, those

are no indication of how successful one will be later in life. I was on the Bulletin Board, with the fourth highest GPA in the whole school. I remember I had to address my classmates at some gathering in Assembly Hall, but I felt so ill-prepared that I don't think I managed my task. Vicho Mehandjiev, the class secretary, was more ambitious and such a representative function would have suited him better.



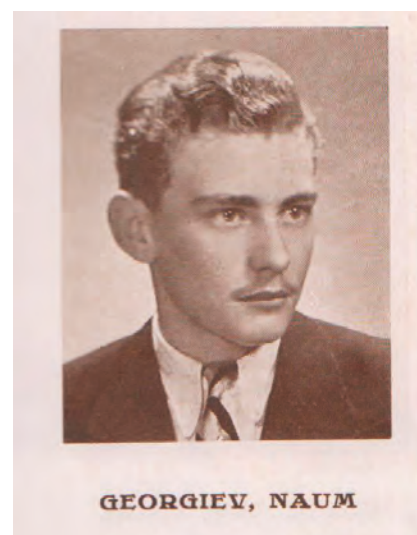
I wasn't much of an athlete, nor was I especially active in extracurricular activities. I possessed average intelligence but I was good at studying. And once you become a diligent student, much like with a handwriting style, you're stuck with it: you can't just shake it off, so you keep it up out of habit. It's as if I was expected to be a good student,

“Once you become a diligent student, much like with a handwriting style, you're stuck with it: you can't just shake it off, so you keep it up out of habit.

so I was living up to the expectations. That's just how things turned out.

I've had classmates make fun of me or throw slighting comments my way, too. Once I got in a fight with

another student, a year older than me, Naum Georgiev, and I ended up with a crooked nose. That was in my first form year and he had been relegated to our class. We fought near the bedroom sink, but what



for I don't recall anymore. I doubt there's anyone who never got into fights at that age.

The truth is I started off with F's in German both terms the first year at the German School, and my parents saw fit to hire a private tutor (for my sister and me), a German lady named Olga Balkanova, married to a Russian officer who had left Russia. She was very, very good, and had a perfect command of French, too. She saved me and I acquired a solid base and confidence thanks to our lessons. That's how I became a good student and then remained that way to the end of my studies.

It's interesting that even now I speak German – the language I studied first – with greater ease. My second foreign language was French. From the start and all the way through my studies, I learned from very good professionals. The second foreign language teaching at the German School was very in-depth and lasted three years. After that, I continued at the College with Mr. Hristoforov

and Mr. Berlan, a Frenchman who had come to Europe after spending years in Africa.

This here (*pointing at the 1940 yearbook*) was our first English teacher at the College, Ms. Helen Shedden. We studied English very intensively, 12 hours a week. I remember Ms. Shedden asking to see me in private somewhere around the middle of the first term to ask me to help a classmate,



HELEN SHEDDEN
INSTRUCTOR IN ENGLISH

Tsvetan, who was having trouble with the language. This was a turning point in my English language career.

Generally, the College had a very good teaching staff. I remember my teachers very well; they live on in my mind. Benjamin Stolzhus taught us history of religions and psychology,

Mr. Panayotov taught history and Mr. Yankov was one of the senior administrators and taught math, as well. Mr. Bliss, who taught the other

class, was the best English teacher. Our math teacher Mr. Zlatanov was, to me, made of gold¹. It didn't

“I remember Ms. Shedden asking to see me in private somewhere around the middle of the first term to ask me to help a classmate, Tsvetan, who was having trouble with the language. This was a turning point in my English language career.

matter that he gave me my only A-. In fact, I don't hold any grudges against any of my teachers. I was a diligent student, so what grudges could I possibly hold!

I remember how we younger students looked up almost in awe to



Konstantin Zlatanov, instructor in math,
1940 Yearbook

the older ones; we knew their names and faces well. I knew very well who Petko Bocharov was, even though we didn't meet at the College, as he graduated in the spring of the year I joined the College in the fall.

At the end of each term, we had to pass exams in all subjects in which our grade was lower than an A-, or was it a B, I don't remember. I, on

the other hand, with my straight A's across the board, could leave a week earlier for the Christmas holidays – this was my greatest joy of all. Together with the three years older Peter Stoychev '41, I would get a cab in the evening and we would be home a week before everyone else – a major affair!

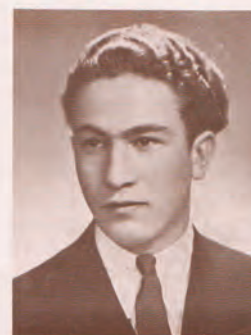
In 1940, the last *Bor* Yearbook came out. The

father of the College student Konstantin Kokoshkov, a friend of mine, was the director of the state printing house where the yearbook was printed.

After the Americans were forced to leave in 1942, Ivan Dyakov, an ELL teacher who had

STOYCHEV, PETER

Obtaining a full view of Peter requires close observation from at least three sides, which will reveal three quite different persons. First, there is the Peter of the sports field. You see a young fellow gracefully shooting at the basket, or violently smashing the volley ball, or unassumingly winning the ping-pong championship, always with a slight smile of satisfaction and of sure victory. Then there is the Peter of the dormitory – a broad smile, making lots of fun over some small joke, dividing into equal parts some cake just received from Plovdiv and loudly boasting that no girl has ever succeeded in winning his heart. And finally there is the third Peter – the serious, and probably the real one – attentive in class, and its zealous secretary, member of "Rilski Shepot" and secretary of Carnegie,



a greatly ambitious person who, however, has never broken College rules, an earnest seeker of true friendship.

¹ Zlatanov comes from 'zlato', the Bulgarian word for 'gold'

come to the College from America, took over as the school's director. I recall going to him with two of my classmates and friends in our last year at the College when it was just a few of us left, and asking him to transfer us and two more boys from the bigger dormitory bedroom to the smaller one. We were happy and a little surprised that he agreed.

Little did we know when we left for Christmas vacation in 1943, that we wouldn't be returning to campus after the holidays as usual. Instead, the second semester was canceled because of the bombings and evacuations and it was only in July that we returned to get our diplomas issued by the State Co-ordinated Foreign Language High School in Simeonovo. Our class had been the last to follow the original curriculum, but there were just 15-16 of us who stayed on till the end in spring 1944. The rest had spread out to various schools in Sofia and the country.

Life and Career after the College

After the College, I did basic army training as part of the First Artillery Regiment. The compulsory military service used to be 2 years. In the army I met a lot of young men like myself – my brothers in arms – and one of them, Ivan Bidikov, got a job as an administrative secretary at the Union of Bulgarian Artists after his military service. When my five months of training were over, I was appointed at the War Ministry in the department responsible for communication with the Allied Control Commission. My first assignments had to do with meeting Russian, American, and British soldiers arriving at the train station.

Next, I enrolled at Sofia University with two majors: Law and Industrial Chemistry, the latter as an attempt to please my father by staying close to his area of expertise. There was a member of the Communist Party responsible for overseeing our neighborhood. His name was Mircho and he made sure I got expelled from the university in February 1949. Looking back, I see he was not all evil – for instance, he didn't go all the way and kick us out of our home and city, which was our worst nightmare. It happened to relatives of ours.

As an expelled student, I was not allowed to stay unemployed, so I

“Little did we know when we left for Christmas vacation in 1943, that we wouldn't be returning to campus after the holidays as usual. Instead, the second semester was canceled because of the bombings and evacuations.

got a job as a construction worker at the high voltage plant site near Iliyantsi. I used to take the tram to a point and then walk to the construction site. On my way, I used to recite aloud two soliloquies: from *Hamlet* “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I...,” learned in rhetorics class with Dr. Floyd Black as coach, and from *Le Cid* by Corneille “Percé jusques le fond du coeur d'une atteinte imprévue...,”² learned in Mr. Berlan's French class.

The construction site manager at Iliyantsi, engineer Nikola Govedarski, was a man from the old school, and he put me and two other young men like me in his office to work on administrative tasks.

At the beginning of 1951, my military service mate Bidikov, whom I mentioned earlier, found me and helped me get an office position at the Union of Bulgarian Artists. I worked for about 15 years as an accountant there, in spite of my bad reputation as an expelled student. At some point, those expelled for political reasons were offered a chance to enroll in a university with a major connected to the field they were currently working in; this is how I majored in accounting, something I found totally uninspiring. I studied by correspondence for 5 years, because I was working full-time at the UBA. I was quite happy with my colleagues and the community there. I knew about 700 Bulgarian artist-members of the Union by their three names. Many of them I knew personally, from Dechko Uzunov, Bai Dechko to me, to the youngest ones in the applied arts.

In 1965, I transferred to the *Bulgarian Artist* Publishing House as managing editor for translations. I stayed there until the end of my working career. We published a lot of multilingual summaries of texts in English, French, German and, less often, in Russian. I myself have privately translated about 70 books, and aside from that, I have edited a great deal more. We had very good translators of all four languages. Oftentimes, I worked with Gerda Minkova, the German wife of Prof. Marko Minkov who taught English Philology at Sofia University. Gerda was a very conscientious translator and such a refined human being. Some of the German translations, especially those of children's books, were given to another talented translator, Lotte Markova.

² Pierced to my heart's depths, suddenly,/ By a stroke as unexpected...



Sava Savchev '44, reunion organizer Natalia Manolova, and Nikolay Georgiev '44 at the annual Alumni Christmas Reception, 2013

In the early years, I mostly translated from German and French. I started with Van Gogh's letters in two volumes. If those were given to me now, probably something totally different would come out because it was an abbreviated version, a selection from a vast original material. I followed the German edition, but not entirely, adding many texts from the French original – you know, from Paris to Arles and to the end of his days Van Gogh wrote almost entirely in French. The 50,000 total print copies of the two-volume edition, which included a special leather case, sold out in just two days. Only the non-fictional biographies that French author Henri Perruchot wrote on Cezanne, Renoir, Manet, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Lautrec and Seurat – most of them also in my translation – could compete with that success.

Not everybody was happy with the result of my first editing assignment, as some found I was intervening too much. I may have overdone it, I don't know. I recall how we got a translation proposal by a certain Emilia Georgieva, a singer by

profession, who had emigrated to Italy when she was young and had studied Art History there. After her singing career was over, she translated a work by Prof. Giulio Carlo Argan, a distinguished Italian scholar, writer and art historian, and sent us her translation. I did not like her work very much, so I rolled up my sleeves and started editing. I worked a whole year on this and I even put my name next to hers, well, after hers, of course, as a translator from Italian. I still have that book on my bedside table as a mental exercise of some kind. When reading it now, I find some of the passages hard to understand. You can't imagine what language, what precision of argument, and what means of expression Argan employs! Every conclusion and judgment is reached with uncompromising strictness, which isn't in our culture yet. This book, nevertheless, brought me immense satisfaction, the kind of satisfaction that comes with work well done. The Union of Bulgarian Translators awarded me for it.

Upon my retirement, I gradually transitioned to translating from

Bulgarian to English language, which requires more effort and browsing dictionaries and other reference books. I've been subscribed to *The Economist* for 15 years now – a publication for exemplary English prose.

Keeping in Touch with Former Classmates

Sava (Savchev '44) and I speak on the phone once in a while; we usually touch base when we get a message from the College. I think the last time I saw him was at the ACS Christmas alumni reception a year and a half ago. Young alumni picked us up and gave us a ride, very kind of them.

On Hristo Belchev St., very close to where I live, lives another classmate of mine, Dimo Boychev. Somehow Dimo and I did not keep in touch.

What else can I say? I am almost 92, I'm not up for cultivating friendships. I did not start a family in my lifetime. There were a few disappointments, then inertia, and that was it. I never felt lonely though, because my sister and her family lived in the same



“Let me show you something interesting!”

apartment with me. Till the very end she stayed close to me; she died about a year and a half ago at the age of 94.

I never thought I would live that long. When I was young, I tried imagining what it would be like to live to the year 2000, when I would be 76. This seemed rather improbable.

But medicine is different now; many times even cancer can be healed if diagnosed early enough.

I still go out, but just 2-3 blocks away. (*Leaning on his cane, he gets up to make coffee: Italian coffee maker, incomparable!*). I try to go out at least once a day.

My nephew, my sister's grandson, applied to the College quite a few years ago, but was not accepted; he was so disappointed. Now he is 27, finishing his master's in Cultural Studies. His thesis is on a topic from medieval history, and I helped him

recently with a translation from German of a text about a medieval heretic, Marcion.

With a mysterious smile, he fetches a black-and-white family portrait off the wall and asks me whether I can see a

“ Every relatively long life inevitably flows through many changes and mishaps. There are hardships, yes, but the passage of time tones them down.

familiar face in this photo. I browse the image and exclaim upon recognizing no other than Ivan Vazov! It turns out Nikolay's grandmother is Anna Vazova-Pacheva, Ivan Vazov's sister, and Saba Vazova, their mother, is also in the photo. I reluctantly promise Nikolay not to share this so that it doesn't sound like he is bragging about it, but secretly hope that he will change his mind until this gets published, and so he does.

What else to say except that every relatively long life inevitably flows

through many changes and mishaps. There are hardships, yes, but the passage of time tones them down.

You know, I was initially nervous about this visit of yours. I'm not

used to occupying people with myself, but somehow I felt at ease and opened up. You should know that there is no other school in Bulgaria, surely not a high school,

with traditions such as those of the American College. No one else does things like what you're doing right now, reaching out to older generations and being genuinely interested in our stories. Thank you!

March 2016

Theodora Konetsovska '97: Keep Your Accent and Your Last Name!

Commencement Address - May 18, 2018

Theodora first set foot on the ACS campus in 1992. During her five years here, Theodora was passionate about English poetry and Bulgarian literature, and harbored a deep fear of math, physics and philosophy. She played the piano almost as much as she attended classes, under the tutelage of the awesome Ms. Angelova. Theodora also discovered her love of acting – headlining in the role of a fat lady in a Polish play called *Who Laughs Last* and in a tiny role in the musical *The Fantasticks*. After graduating from ACS in 1997, Theodora attended Williams College in Massachusetts, where she studied Political Science and Economics. Following graduation in 2001, she became an investment banker at Goldman Sachs in New York for 12 years, after which she took a senior financial role at Harvard University. Theodora has served on the ACS board of trustees since 2012. She lives in Boston, MA with her husband Daniel and her two sons, Svetlin and Kalin.

Class of 2018, hello! What an honor to be joining your special day today!

I have to tell you, there's nothing more effective in making you feel old than being invited to speak at the high school graduation of people who weren't even *born* when *you* graduated high school! My first thought was, nah, I'm not ready to share wisdom with young people! Thanks, Dr. Ewing, but please invite someone with actual wisdom! Then I realized – wait, I'm 40 years old, I can figure this out! I can just steal other people's great ideas! So I went to my 6-year-old son. I said, Svetli what should I talk to them about? He said, "Star Wars!" Then I went to a fellow ACS alumnus; he said, "Gotta mention *The Hunger Games*, so they know you're not a total dinosaur!" Finally, I asked a colleague in his 50's and he said, "Talk about world hunger and solving world peace." Thanks for the advice, guys! So here I am. I promise to cover each of these gems, *and* to keep you awake – just pay close attention and clap when you hear each of them.

I wanted to speak to you today about leadership and your important role as leaders. I was introduced to leadership by ACS. After 9th grade, ACS sent me to a leadership camp in the US, where the long-standing moto was "It's better to light a candle



than to curse the darkness." In other words, we can complain or run away from a problem – or we can look for

a solution. We can give up or we can remain enthusiastic and determined. We can accept the way things are or

we can challenge them.

“It’s better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” It seems like this saying is especially important today, in a world of escalating conflict, human strife near and far, and an always unstable economy that affects our most vulnerable citizens first. “It’s better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” I’ve tried to live by this motto as much as possible. And I am heartened to see our own community of ACS alumni live by it, too. Just the other day I had lunch with a wonderful young leader, Georgi Klissurski, Class of 2010, who loves his country almost as much as he loves ACS. I am certain that one day he will be the President of Bulgaria. In the meantime, he leads with his actions in his ACS community and in his graduate work at the Harvard Kennedy School. There are many examples like him in our ACS community of alumni.

ACS, of course, was re-built in huge part by a formidable leader who, too, decided to light a candle rather than curse the darkness in 1992, Dr. Roger Whitaker. As we heard earlier this afternoon, none of this – not the school, not the beautiful campus with a glorious, new Campus Center, not 21 years of alumni – 21! – would have happened without him. Dr. Whitaker is the vision and the brawn behind the gorgeous reality we’re sharing today. In the time I’ve had the privilege to serve on the board of trustees under his leadership, I have seen in Dr. Whitaker the perfect embodiment of grace, patience, respect for fellow humans, and an almost pathological obsession with baseball. My class, your class, and many classes after us will be deeply indebted to the quiet, resolute and charismatic leadership of this exceptional man.

But the best ACS leaders *yet* are all of you. You are our youngest, smartest, and most ambitious. And so I want to share with you some of



Theodora (first from right, kneeling) and the rest of the cast of *The Fantasticks* with their faculty advisers Maria Angelova, Matthew Brown, and Laura Giosh-Markov

my learnings from all sorts of trials, tribulations, successes and failures, to help inspire the growing leader in you.

Be brave. When you wonder if to do or not, do. If you question

“We can accept the way things are or we can challenge them.

whether to go or not, go. When you hesitate if you should speak up or not, speak. Explore, jump in, have an opinion, disagree, defend your beliefs. Now is the time to challenge, experiment, figure out where you stand and where you want to go. There is much to be resolved in this world – world hunger, world peace! *(audience clapping)* We need your bravery, determination, and opinion to get solutions. In the timeless words of Yoda, “Do. Or do not. There is no try.” *(audience clapping)*

Surprise yourself. When you get to university, take a class in a very unfamiliar area or join a club you have zero prior experience in. You may enjoy yourself more than you ever imagined. I waited until my senior year in college to take art history – I’m so glad I did take it, it became the true

love of my life. The play I acted in while at ACS was the first time I ever acted on stage. Acting is now such an important part of my daily job – I do finance 😊.

Make many mistakes. But just the right kind. I don’t believe we should try to avoid mistakes in life – on the contrary, a good mistake is a great lesson. The trick is to make the right kind of mistake – not a stupid mistake that you could avoid or know is a worthless waste of time. My favorite mistake? Working 18-hour days in my first two years in investment banking. At the time, at age 23, 24, 25 I lived in the greatest city in the world – bustling, never-sleeping, colorful New York – and I barely ever left my office. I wanted to earn lots of money, succeed in my career, be appreciated as a professional. And I did achieve all of that. But I also learned that my job didn’t love me like my friends loved me, and will now tell everyone who listens not to ever make that work-life balance choice, no matter the job, their age or the city they live in.

Find a mentor or someone who can offer advice in unfamiliar situations. It took me a long time to



Theodora and ACS President Dr. Ewing at the Commencement Ceremonies of Class of 2018

realize that I'm not expected to have all the answers all the time. It's very, very helpful to ask other people to help you or share their perspective. Like I asked all those people about my speech! And I'm doing a good job, right?

Be a mentor to those around you. Feeling responsible for the success of another person is a very important growth opportunity. And it is such a fulfilling emotion to share in someone else's goals and aspirations, achievements and temporary setbacks. These people may end up teaching you more than you teach them – and in the process, you'll become friends for life.

Keep your accent and your last name. Wherever you go next, appreciate the beautiful world of diversity and uniqueness we all live in. Share *your* beauty and

your uniqueness. Each one of you is a shining gem – with your background, your perspective, your experiences. Do not attempt to assimilate, neutralize, or downplay your language, your love of family and country, the blood in your veins. Especially in moments of difficulty or indifference, that sense of belonging will carry you forward.

“Explore, jump in, have an opinion, disagree, defend your beliefs. Now is the time to challenge, experiment, figure out where you stand and where you want to go.

Just look at my name, and you know I speak from experience – on many occasions I've regretted not slashing 80% of it and calling myself Theodora Ko³. But the sacrifice never, ever felt worth it enough. I

even gave my two Boston-residing sons Bulgarian names – hopefully, my little gems Svetlin and Kalin won't hate me for it when they're your age.

And lastly, **give back to ACS.** Get in touch with current students. Stay in touch with each other and with alumni who may need your advice at school or at work... or when writing a high school graduation speech. Consider volunteering on our committees and on the Board of trustees. And in everything you do, continue to represent the rare gift and life lesson that ACS has been for you. Without your continuing help, the ACS of the future will not be as beautiful, as impactful or as lasting.

Class of 2018 – May the odds be ever in your favor! (*audience clapping*) Congratulations.

³Theodora's husband's last name is Ko.

Ivan Ivanov '18:

You Cannot Compare a Medal to Making Someone Feel Proud of You

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

It's impossible to fit all of Ivan's awards, achievements, and medals in just a quarter of a page, so I won't attempt to. I'll just say that he is the one-in-a-generation programmer who is a genius mathematician who can make robots – and all his triumphs haven't made him one bit less humble, true, and warm. In his senior year at the College, Ivan received both the Math and Computer Science Department Award and the Floyd Black Award, presented for hard work, honesty, respect, responsibility, and love for learning. I had the pleasure of interviewing him on one of his last days at ACS, on a beautiful day in May, somewhere between Last School Bell and Senior Dinner. As we sat conversing on a bench by the Fountain, now sunken in lush greenery, the newly completed Campus Center rising behind Ivan, my confidence in a brighter future, invented by this young man and the other talented people of his generation out there, grew by the minute. For this future, I'm ready!



So what is the life of an ACS senior like for you, Ivan?

Well, a lot different than previous years because now you realize that you finish school but it doesn't mean you're gonna rest now; the exact opposite: now you have to deal with all those aspects of life which school in one way or another combined previously and you didn't even notice. It feels great because you have finished something to the end but, as many say, life is just beginning.

Do you know where you're going next?

I have a conditional offer from Cambridge and their only

requirement is for me to get a good grade on the matriculation exam. If I manage to get that, which I'm currently aiming at, I will study there for the next three years, most probably four, because they include also a Master's degree at the end.

Which subjects are you doing matriculation exams in?

I'm doing first the mandatory Bulgarian one and then the math exam. At math, I feel more comfortable than English or any other subject; it has been my interest 10 years now and I feel I would realize my full potential this way.

What major are you planning to study at Cambridge?

Computer Science. There they offer just one general course, it's not divided into sections. As I have read its curriculum, the major covers almost all aspects of programming, so at the end I will be able to choose what I want to specialize in.

So matriculation is what you're up to these days?

Yes, predominantly, since it's at the very end and it would be a pity if I didn't do so well.

So, you have some doubts about how you're going to do?

Well, I have some confidence in myself but this doesn't stop me from extra preparation. The more you prepare, the higher results you

can expect. At the end I would prefer to sit for these exams feeling prepared and calm than to feel worried whether I would meet the requirements or not.

We keep hearing of your national and international success in Informatics but also in Math. Did you at one point in your life have to choose between these two, or were you chosen by one, or are these passions easy to combine?

They can be combined to some extent, up to 7th grade they were, as both sciences didn't require too great and in-depth understanding and the material was not that voluminous. However, as I went into high school, I had to make that choice between pure mathematics, meaning that I would be able to solve very complex theoretical problems but I wouldn't be able to apply them so easily into some practical thing, or informatics, which would allow me to solve some theoretical problems to some extent but also to apply what I know directly into practice. So, I chose informatics. I kept solving some math problems but not that much and with not that high intensity.

Very practical sort of thinking for a seventh grader! Did you make that decision yourself?

Let's say some competitions helped me make that choice. In the beginning here at ACS, I didn't have much success in math on a national

level, the other students were also very good and the competition was enormous. With informatics, on the other hand, I quickly became first in two competitions and that motivated me to kind of dive deeper into it and explore it more and more.

How did you and your family choose ACS?

Well, at first I learned of ACS from the daughter of a couple, friends with my parents; she studied here before and her feedback about the school was both positive and helpful. But I kind of felt it impossible to get in here – I mean, I hadn't gone to any preparation courses and enrolled for the exam in the last possible minute. I just didn't do anything special to get in. However, as I came here for the first time, during the admission exam, I really liked the school. I saw it was more than just a school, not a single building where you go, study, and then leave. I would later spend all my days here constantly going through different buildings, living in that world with other students and beautiful nature. Here we have gardens and this very well maintained look of the College makes me proud of my school, makes my time here enjoyable. So, after seeing ACS "in person" at the exam and then getting qualified third among all boys who took the exam, I started considering enrolling here. After I shared this with my parents, they also agreed that it would be a great choice and so I started at ACS.

Would you have decided differently had you been qualified further down or in the reserve list?

Yes, very. At that time my highest priority was to continue at the Sofia High School of Mathematics (SHM) because I had been there three years and I was familiar with the high level of teachers and students there. But it was more or less focused just on math. The other



Accepting the John Atanasoff Award from the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rumen Radev, 2017. He accepted his first from President Plevneliev in 2016.

subjects were kind of marginal, you get some knowledge but it's not enough. While at ACS we have these amazing labs and teachers invest a great amount of effort and passion to teach us, at SHM teachers were good but just not that enthusiastic about their subjects.

What do you dream to be when you grow up?

I would say it was a dream when I came here, now I feel more

“ I don't dream of becoming Iron Man but just of acquiring that knowledge which would help me develop something even I don't consider possible.

comfortable just calling it future realization. I would like to be a programmer dealing with software someday, maybe working for some popular software company or doing research. I still haven't chosen the exact field I would like to specialize in – research or software engineering – but I think it would become clear in college. You see, researchers work at a university dealing with one unsolvable problem. There they have the funds, the researchers, they

just have to come up with the final idea — while software engineers do something directly for the people. They are working with something people are currently using and therefore their thinking is a little bit different, more user-focused, not general theoretical.

What inspires you?

Well, I got inspired to kind of pursue that future from a Marvel character and especially Tony Stark, also known as Iron Man, because as I watched the movie I realized he is very knowledgeable in technology and his knowledge enables him to construct that suit that helps him later. I don't dream of becoming Iron Man but just of acquiring that knowledge which would help me develop something even I don't consider possible.

What is your most marked characteristic?

I do not give up. Even if I face a lot of problems I try to do some planning and fit them into my schedule and just do them instead of just ignoring them or going over them without effort and producing a bad result. However, this sometimes leads to me overworking, a lot, which is not that good, especially in this early stage of my life because it is detrimental to health and I would

need that for the later part of my life. Currently I feel very good, I've been on some kind of vacation last week and I have managed to catch up on sleep and reading. But there were some tough periods, especially last year, when I did all my SATs and in a single week I had to prepare for an SAT exam and do three majors – you cannot plan and predict majors beforehand – and was almost left without any sleep.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your life so far?

I cannot say I have had a very big and deciding challenge, but a certain point of my life where I had to act fast in order to get to the end happened two summers ago as I was preparing for an international exposition. Just the day before departing, as I was trying to implement a new feature into my project, all that tiredness and work that had accumulated, finally resulted in me damaging a little the mainboard of the computer which kind of broke the whole project. This happened at midnight, so I couldn't do anything. In fact, I had two options: either accept that I do not have a project and pretend to be presenting it without demonstration or just work until I fix it. I chose the second option. I worked until 4 am but it was fixed and it did work at the fair later. But at that midnight I really questioned myself, *Will I be able to do this?* It seemed impossible to fix in just 4 hours: the mainboard was a very specific one and I didn't have a replacement, so I had to adopt a new one for the purpose.

What is your favorite journey, metaphorical or real?

It's a real one. It's again connected to this exposition which I just talked about. It was held in Toulouse, France. The good thing was it was not a competition, you had to just go there and present, and you're

pretty calm. There is some kind of worrying again that it could crash in front of the audience but you hope it won't. We had a very good sightseeing of the city, nearby excursions that we also made and talked with the other participants, and it was just great. It left me a very memorable experience. I haven't been back but it's definitely on my list.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Maybe I would like to make myself not feel so obliged to work. I have that quality that when I begin solving something or dealing with one problem I cannot stop until I finally resolve it. That's OK for competition problems but for more general ones it could literally take days or months of constantly thinking about it until finally solving them. I would like to be able at some point to say "That's all for today, forget it, tomorrow you will be dealing with this again." Otherwise this leaves me working many days on something simple which I keep missing. After taking a small rest, I notice it and realize it was that simple.

“If something doesn't go the way you hoped it doesn't mean it's going wrong, it just means it should have taken another direction.”

If you could change one thing about ACS, what would it be?

A general idea I had about ACS that, I think, is currently being implemented with the new Student Computer Innovation & Fabrication Institute (SCIFI) labs which I'm going to unfortunately miss, was to make a working place where the school gives students resources to realize their ideas, not just have them in mind. As I have been on a



Ivan ready to control his robot in Toulouse, France

tour in one of the biggest software companies in Bulgaria, SAP, I have seen they have those specialized rooms with all kinds of devices where workers could just get in, experiment with something, and if it turns out to be working, they can turn it into their own product without having to buy the materials themselves initially. Here they want projects from us but they don't give us the necessary resources. The SCIFI lab would give students this great opportunity to make their ideals real and actually create great projects. Not everyone is good with drawing and creating artistic stuff on paper, some are good with 3D printing. I haven't tried the 3D printer here yet, but I did try the 3D at SAP where I wanted to print a new outfit for my robot.

Your robot?

Yes, the small robot I constructed for that same fair in Toulouse. It was

my first kind of project-oriented computer programming. I took one of those small robots which are driven by batteries and can move forward, backward, left, and right and with it I tried to implement a glove for gesture control. You put the glove on and you can control the robot via gestures. I managed to do this first with my own materials but then, as I got selected for the fair, I wanted to make it a little more visually appealing – with my own materials there were wires all over the glove. I talked with SAP and they said they could help me with their 3D printers. So, I both constructed a new outfit for the robot and made the glove from plastic.

And what would you change about school in general?

It would be great if every school had makerspace like that. But also, for every school except ACS as we kind of already have it here, I wish they had club-based learning. Usually students have a lot of different interests they are not able to pursue in the standard school curriculum. This would be corrected with clubs, where students could make friends and also learn new things; as they get closer they share their knowledge and build on one another's. A certain good thing in our school curriculum is that it covers almost every aspect of sciences as a whole and most predominantly that we graduate with very good common knowledge. I have a friend in England, who studies only 5 subjects of his choice in high school. He studies only those 5 subjects, takes exam in each one. However, if they choose predominantly sciences like physics, math, and computer science they won't have sufficient knowledge in history, biology, which in a casual conversation is obvious.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

My greatest achievement is coming up to that point now when I have almost finished school and got my offer from Cambridge, I feel that everything I have started thus far comes to a good end and hopefully

in September a new beginning would come with its new challenges.

What do you most value in your friends?

That they are supportive. I've been through a lot of competitions and sometimes I'm in the top rankings and sometimes I'm not. When I'm not I feel some indignation and sadness, too. Then, my friends show up and say it's not a big deal, next time you'll do better – this calms me a little, and makes me forget about it. When I'm on the other hand in the top rankings, they tell me they're proud of me, and this makes me feel even better. You cannot compare a medal to making someone feel proud of you. The medal is just an object and doesn't mean anything without the result and effort behind it. I can easily go and buy one from HIT and it won't mean anything.

And what do you most dislike in people?

Maybe when people pretend to be someone they're not. Many people imitate others and it's too obvious and doesn't go well. Everyone has their own individual approach to life so people should follow their own way, not trying to copy others.

What are your favorite books?

With ACS and all those competitions, I don't get that much time to read but some of my favorite books of all times are the books of the Harry

Potter series. I like how they're focused around magical events, at the same time being entraining and relieving, offering you an escape from reality. I also like *Winnetou* by Karl May, because the books in that series, even if purely unrealistic, describe a culture very different from ours and an imaginary place. My father mentioned he had the books but he couldn't find them, so I rented them electronically, a great way to take a bunch of books with you for summer vacation and even on the beach.

When and where were you happiest?

The moment I was happiest happened last year when I got selected for the Research Science Institute (RSI) summer program held at MIT. I didn't expect it; I think I did terribly on the interview and I just wanted to get home afterwards. The jury from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences asked me specific questions, one of them being whether I know someone at MIT, like a name, who would be able to help me deal with parallelism. Instead of lying persuasively, I told the truth that I didn't. I thought they expected me to list professor names. But then eventually they said I was chosen along with a girl. I was really surprised! This coincided with the end of first semester final exams and I was happy both about them and this journey; at that time I wanted



Presenting at MIT

to go to MIT after graduating from ACS. But as I went there, I found it to be too monotonous after a while. When I visited Cambridge later, I realized this was the place for me. One term in Cambridge is 8-10 weeks, in MIT it's longer.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Imagine you're working on a very big project, a product of your lengthy work and you release it into practice and it's working without major problems. Then you say to yourself *Well, I can rest a little bit now*. For a short amount of time you enjoy that rest when you feel fulfilled and can celebrate with your friends.

Is there anything that you regret?

Well, if something doesn't go the way you hoped it doesn't mean it's going wrong, it just means it should have taken another direction. I think that every decision I have made has to some extent importance to where I am now.

Your best and your worst day at ACS?

My best day at ACS was the Last Bell Ceremony day because it was kind of a school day but without all the teaching and lessons. We gathered in classes again, so we met with one another, our teachers said they were thankful for us graduating, and at the end, the whole school shared our enthusiasm. Our English teacher played a video from a graduation speech that he liked – again a lesson but one we were ready to take. If teachers had something to finish they did it quickly and from then on we arranged in a circle and talked to one another – not like students and teachers anymore but like friends; they shared life lessons, we mostly listened.

As per the worst day – I cannot think of any day in particular but I would almost surely say it was a day when I got too many assignments to do, I didn't sleep well the night before, felt irritated the whole day, and just

wanted the day to end so I can go home and...

Do the assignments?

No, sleep. (*laughing*)

What is ACS to you?

A life-changing experience. An amazing one, too, with plenty of unexpected outcomes. I never imagined myself being here when I was in 7th grade. I didn't have any idea what I would do next; I was just solving more and more problems for competitions. While here, at ACS, I realized competitions are not life; they're good because they test your knowledge but you should definitely do other meaningful things besides them. While I was here, I started doing these projects, a step further from competitions, because you don't do them a few hours and then you're ready; you do them for days, weeks, even months sometimes, and at the end, when you present them in front of someone, you realize this was a product of lengthy work, not something anyone can do in a couple of hours. Also, I started doing some personal projects for more or less personal use. I have developed my own web server and kind of domain. I have played with some robotic parts at home and it is a lot different when you do something personal because you appreciate it as a user yourself. If you solve some task for a competition, you just solve it and forget about it but with this personal projects you use them every day and you improve on them every day.

I'm somehow reminded of that TED video *Why you should make useless things* Mr. Youngs recently shared.

Yes, I would say that nothing is useless. For example, this domain I talked about, I set it up in 8th grade just to advertise it to my friends, like *Look, I got my own domain; if you type this link it goes home and then returns to you*, that kind of thing, foolish almost, especially since I invested a great deal of time into it and did a lot of things with no pay-off. Until recently I got an email from a

software company that said *We came to your site by mistake and we really like it. Would you like to connect with us?* I didn't expect it but this was the pay-off of my efforts from three years ago. So, you see, there's nothing useless, some things just haven't found their proper use yet.

What would you like to take with you from your ACS experience and what would you gladly shed?

I would like to keep the club activities even in university. I know in Cambridge I will have this possibility, even with the great deal of studying. I would gladly leave behind this construction on campus – it marked half of my stay at ACS. At some point it felt like the whole ACS was turned into a construction site, there was mud everywhere. We all looked like construction workers after walking between buildings. But now, as we see the ready campus center I feel it was really worth it. We had a tour of it on our last day of school and it's amazing!

Where would you most like to live long term?

Most probably somewhere in Europe. I haven't thought about a dream country yet but certainly, I like Switzerland a lot – it has everything and also some of the most important Google offices are there. My greater aim is to work there: first, because it is here in Europe and second, it combines both approaches I told you about, you can do research while being a software engineer, and this in a great place.

What's your message to former and future ACSers?

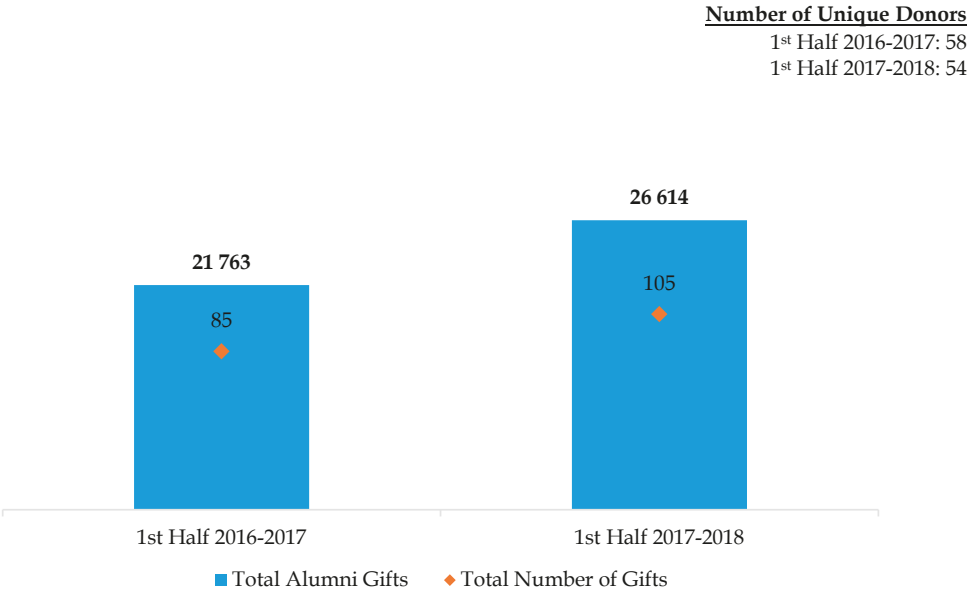
Even though the world is changing and ACS is not exactly the way you and we remember it in the beginning, it is still a great place with its modern technology and how student opinion is valued – anyone who comes to study here would surely benefit.

ACS Alumni Fund Report

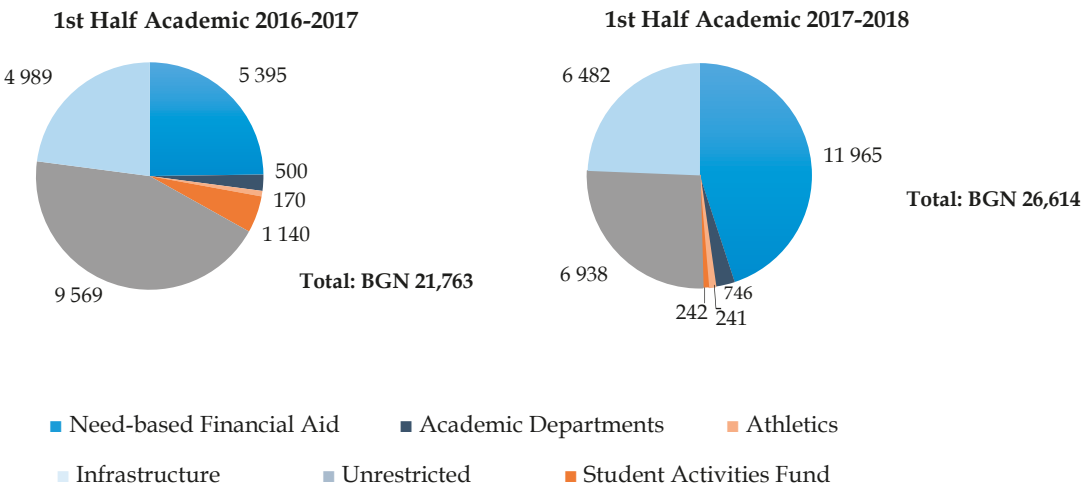
September 2017 – March 2018

Quick Overview

Gifts Breakdown by Year (Bulgarian leva)



Gifts Breakdown by Category (Bulgarian leva)



Message from the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee

Dear Fellow Alumni,

Thank you for your continuous support of ACS! As of March 31, 54 graduates have made contributions to the Alumni Fund, and more have followed suit since. 2017/2018 marks the sixth annual campaign of the Fund as well as 25 years since the reopening of the College in 1992. Given these two occasions and the tremendous success of last year's campaign, the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee (AFAC) has set the most ambitious participation target to date: 225 alumni making a gift by August 31. Last year, our community surpassed the participation target for the first time with 192 alumni donors. Will you make a gift of any size today to support ACS students and help the Fund reach its goal? Additionally, if you would like to automate your giving for future years, you can enroll in recurring giving online.

We alumni are lucky this year to once again have the support of the Gipson Family who has committed to matching 1-to-1 all alumni gifts to Infrastructure and ACS Priorities through August 31, 2018. We express our gratitude to Nellie and Bob Gipson for all they do for the College and hope that their generosity will motivate the alumni community to show ever more support for ACS as well. Previously, alumni gave almost 66,000 BGN which was matched by the Gipsons, and the total contribution to the College was over 130,000 BGN. This month, the new Campus Center is opening and it will truly carry ACS into the 21st century and beyond with spectacular state-of-the-art educational facilities.

In addition, the first half of 2017/2018 marked several exciting developments in continuing to build our alumni community. In October, alumni and trustees met for drinks in Boston, with over 25 total participants, and we engaged in conversations reminiscing about the past and thinking about the future. In March, New York City alumni got together for what has become a traditional annual happy hour. Watch out for more events this spring and summer in Sofia and London. Most importantly, we are working on identifying an additional European city as a gathering spot for alumni, so let us know your preference by answering the poll we created in the American College of Sofia Alumni group on Facebook or by writing to us at the email address below.

AFAC welcomes your ideas and questions so please do not hesitate to contact us at giving@acsbg.org. Our team strives to provide opportunities for alumni to give back to ACS and to strengthen our bonds, so your feedback is essential! In the coming months, look out for emails regarding the ways in which alumni involvement with ACS will evolve to ensure a more robust support system for ACS and the alumni community.

Sincerely,

The Alumni Fund Advisory Committee

Georgi Klissurski '10

Yana Staneva '12

Zara Rancheva '14

Nicole Levakova '16

Hristo Popov '01

Niki Kouzmanov '02

Kalina Kourdova '11

Alex Kanov '12

CLASS NOTES

Former ACS faculty reunion on Hawaii where **Jaime Johnson** and **Richard Braithwaite** have been working since leaving ACS in 2011



Mr. Jewett and Dr. Savage's daughter Socha, Ms. Howell's boyfriend Mike Lycea, Dr. Shannon Savage, Sarah Howell, Jeff Jewett, Jaime Johnson, and her and Richard Braithwaite's kids Eli and Summit



Gergana Manolova '12 recently completed her MSc in Strategic Marketing from Imperial College Business School London and for the last 6 months has been building her own wine brand Augeo Family Estate. Augeo comes from Latin and means to grow, to develop, but also to honor. Gergana's mission is to

create exquisite Bulgarian wines. The first wine Augeo Melnik 55 2016, launched in October 2017, was an instant success winning two medals so far from international wine challenges in England and China, one of them double gold. In April four more wines from the brand were introduced - Augeo Sauvignon

Blanc 2017, Augeo Chardonnay Barrel 2016, Augeo Rose 2017 and Augeo Exquisite Rose 2017. All ACS alumni are welcome to try all wines at The View Restaurant in Sofia, Gergana's other business, or look for them in specialized wine shops.

<http://augeofamilyestate.bg/>

AMERICA FOR BULGARIA
CAMPUS CENTER





ACS ALUMNI Magazine

И никой още не е успял докрай да надникне
даже в собствения си живот и душа,
защото в човека винаги има нещо, или живее нещо,
което е по-голямо от самия него.

Йордан Радичков



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