



# ACS ALUMNI MAGAZINE

*Issue 22, December 2019*

*Featuring:*

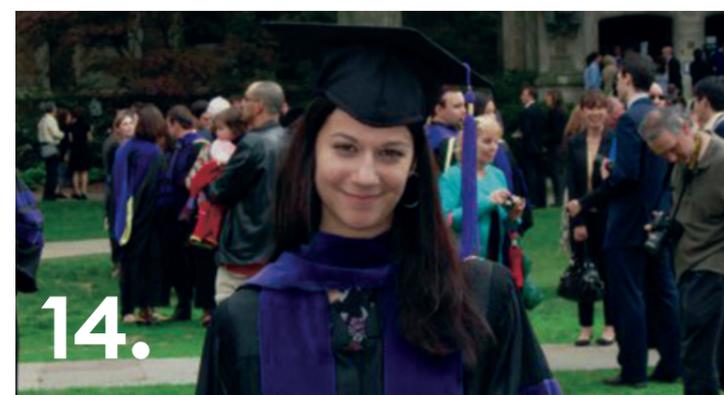
*Lily Klyavkova '39*

*Taniel Gulian '19*

*Lilia Vazova '02*

*Roumyana Ivanova*





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Outer front cover - The America for Bulgaria Campus Center on a winter's night. Photo by Christian R. Youngs.

Inner back cover - The Fountain. Photo by Zornitsa Haidutova.

Outer back cover - The Fountain and the America for Bulgaria Campus Center. Photo by Zornitsa Haidutova.

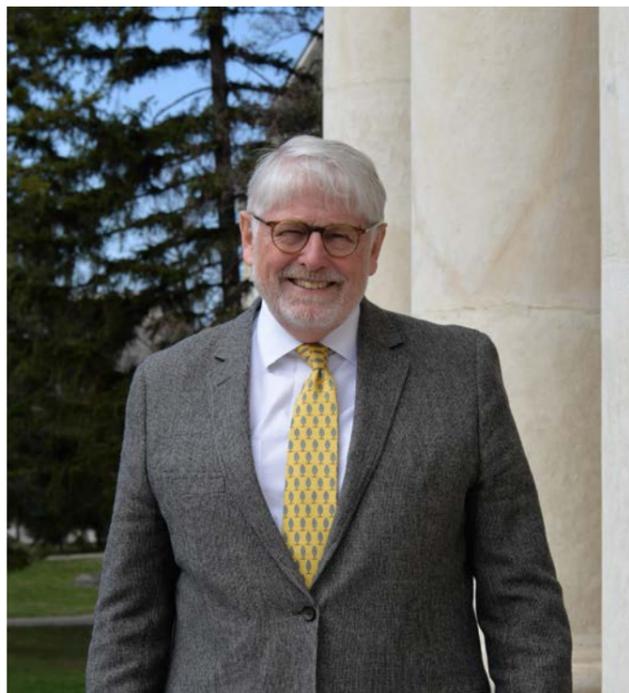
# FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

The Chilean educator and intellectual Gabriela Mistral so beautifully captured the essence of school work in her poem *Su Nombre es Hoy*: “Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, his mind is being developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow, his name is today.” School is all about what happens each and every day in the classroom, on stage, in the labs, on the playing fields among and between students and their teachers, mentors, coaches, and advisors. Educators seeking to prepare young people for the future must embrace Goethe’s mantra: nothing is worth more than this day; for students and their teachers it is the here and now that matters. And yet, for school leadership and trustees it must also be about tomorrow.

Understanding this, at its November meetings in Washington, DC, the ACS Board of Trustees endorsed moving forward with a comprehensive strategic planning process to help chart the future of the College. Over the past few years we have grappled with a number of major issues including ways to clarify and measure expected student outcomes; re-examination of admissions criteria and processes; how best to increase financial aid and expand and support student diversity; how to attract and retain outstanding faculty and staff; and all the while acknowledging the ongoing importance of increasing fundraising, expanding Alumni engagement, implementing ongoing campus renovation, and maintaining balanced budgets while moderating tuition increases. Moving forward, we hope to bring these critical and related strands together through a planning process that engages stakeholders in helping chart a dynamic course for the future.

Let us not forget that there was a time when all that constituted the American College of Sofia were the Board, surviving Alumni, and the library collection hidden away in the Rila Monastery. The campus still existed, but was occupied by those who despised ACS and its values and pursued activities antithetical to its mission and work. During those years of exile, the idea of the College was kept alive in the hearts and minds of Alumni and trustees. The Board continued its work, supporting other, like-minded institutions with grants from the endowment while keeping hope alive for the future; acting boldly with a group of dedicated Alumni when the opportunity came to re-open; and persevering with resilience as well as determination during many lean years that followed. Even as we benefit now from the planning, determination, and boldness of those who came before us, for ACS to continue to thrive we must face current



challenges thoughtfully and resolutely while being bold about seizing and creating new opportunities.

ACS Alumni have played a key role since the re-opening of the College in 1992 and remain active in leadership roles, both on the Board and in many volunteer capacities. Alumni, you, more than any other constituents, appreciate the impact that ACS has on young people. You understand what an ACS education can achieve: shaping characters and ways of thinking, opening vistas into worlds before unseen, providing life-changing opportunities. We learned from our recent Alumni Questionnaire some of the special ways that ACS influenced your lives. You shared with us what you most valued about your experience here and also areas in which we can improve. ACS’s success depends on having active, involved, and supportive Alumni, and I look forward to your continued input as we plan for the future.

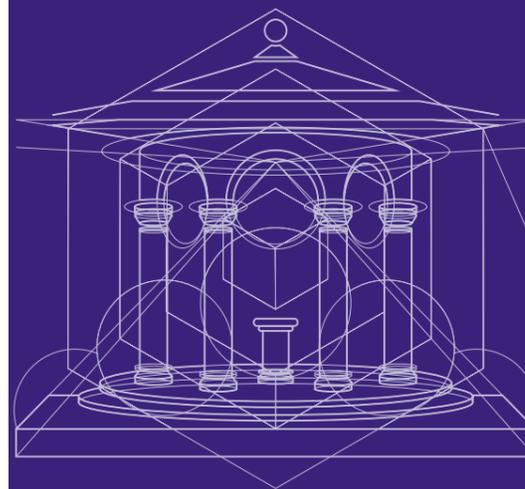
Each generation faces its own set of challenges and opportunities. We must be no less resolute, no less bold, and no less forward thinking than those who came before us. So ultimately we have not one but two charges: make the most of the opportunities we have in the here and now and plan for and invest in the future of our mission and work.

**Richard T. Ewing, Jr., Ed.D.**

President

## ACS ALUMNI MAGAZINE

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suggestions.*

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*Alexander J. Tomov '04*

Dear fellow Alumni,

It is that time of the year again for recounting and evaluating a year past, for looking into the future and spending time with family and loved ones. It is also that time of the year again for the latest ACS Alumni Magazine.

A lot took place at the College since the previous edition. Over the summer I was lucky to hang out with many of you and your families, to celebrate my (2004) class’s Graduation anniversary a couple more times, and to show many of you our beautiful campus and its improvements. Before we knew it, the summer was over and the students and faculty returned to the classrooms while the golden sunsets gradually turned our green campus yellow, orange, and red. The new school year started energetically and we welcomed yet another enthusiastic and wide-eyed class of 180 8th graders who made Sanders Hall their home.

Each day our students continue to prove time and again that hard work, combined with their talents, pays off in incredible ways. As the winter holidays are approaching, all of us on campus are looking forward to another great year, which as we’ll reveal later will be a very special one indeed.

We’ve put together many interviews for you in this 22nd edition of the ACS Alumni Magazine. Petia Ivanova '97 was fortunate enough to have an incredible conversation with the late Lily Klyavkova '39, and I interviewed Taniel Gulian '19, a senior at the time, while we walked around campus and talked. Many of you got in touch with me about Lilia Vazova '02 and her tremendous success as a lawyer in New York City, so I managed to ask her several questions. Last but not least, one iconic ACS educator just celebrated her 25th anniversary of teaching at the College, so she and I sat down in my office for a chat on what makes ACS special. You guessed right, it is the students and the efforts of our teachers. I have invited our Director of Annual Giving, Georgi Iliev, to share some updates on what you as a group can do to positively contribute to our current students’ experience at the school. You must know Georgi from all the stories, appeals for your gifts, and corresponding letters of gratitude he tirelessly sends your way.

I mentioned above that next year is going to be a little more special and that’s because 2020 will be the 160th anniversary of the founding of the American College of Sofia. We already have many ideas on how to share this very special milestone with all of you and the community at large, so please be on the lookout for updates. Feel free to get in touch if you’ve an amazing idea for a celebration and we’ll talk about it.

In the meantime, I hope to meet and stay in touch with even more of you on various occasions. I will be sending more research questions to you, so thanks in advance for responding. I want you to know this: the current students are amazing, their creativity is endless, and their talent is apparent. They are also eager to hear from you and to draw from your knowledge and experience. So don’t be a stranger, drop a line and stop by ACS.

I hope you enjoy this 22nd issue of the ACS Alumni Magazine. Please get in touch with me for anything and everything ACS!

Happy holidays from all of us on Campus!

Sasho



# LILY KLYAVKOVA '39: *I Did Not Dare Show My ACS Diploma*

I have Dimiter Lambrinov '39 to thank for introducing me to his classmate, Lily Klyavkova. A couple of months after interviewing Dimiter, I visited Lily's cosy home that she shared with her daughter and her granddaughter, located in one of the most beautiful parts of downtown Sofia, on Oborishte St., just off Evlogi and Hristo Georgievi Blvd. Lily was waiting for me, peacefully reclining in her armchair. She was small and soft-voiced, and her 97 years did not show at all. As our conversation progressed, I couldn't help but notice she had this gritty aura about her that I have come to associate with pre-war, or perhaps all, American College graduates. Lily and her daughter Elka kept completing each other's sentences and stories, their warm and loving relationship immediately obvious. How fortunate I was, once again, to get acquainted with another touching destiny, another memorable personality whose story was banded together with that of the College!

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

**Lily, how did your parents choose the American College for your high-school studies?**

**Lily:** My family is from Pernik, but we had a house in Sofia and we spent most of our time there. There were a few students, older than me, from Pernik who graduated from the College. My father knew Metodi Georgiev, the mathematics teacher, whose older son Georgi was my classmate later. Mr. Georgiev introduced my father to Dr. Floyd H. Black and the rest is history. My sister started at the College first, two years before me, but she got sick with scarlet fever for the second time and had to quit the College to stay at home where she was safe instead. I, on the other hand, stayed at the College to the end.

The years spent at the College were for me, and for all my classmates, the happiest years in life. There were others who took care of us; we were carefree and only had our studies to think about.

It was difficult at first but you get used to it. We got along very well, there was no envy between us, we were a very strong class and very supportive of one another. I had a lot of friends. My first closest friend was Finka Landau. She was a Jew and had to leave before graduating in our last year, together with another classmate, also a Jew. Their families moved to Vienna and they finished high school there instead. Finka's father had a factory in Knyazhevo for dry cleaning and painting.

*“The years spent at the College were for me, and for all my classmates, the happiest years of my life. Others worried about and took care of us; we were carefree, we just had our studies to think about.”*

(while looking at the yearbook) They called me Lilyanka because we had another Lily Ivanova and I was baptized Lilyanka originally, too.

**Elka** (after reading the blurb about Lily in the yearbook): And so she has always been and is today.

**Lily, what are your most vivid memories of the College? Which classmates and teachers do you still remember today?**

**Lily:** I remember we had a classmate who was a sleepwalker in the first year - and we were all so frightened.

I was close with Mimi Alexandrova, Todor Alexandrov's daughter, and also with Lily Vidinska.

Daisy Levieva left for America. Some time after 1989 she came back and invited us for an evening get-together. She used to call on the phone from America, but it's been a while now.

The other Lily Ivanova left before graduating, quite a few students did. Some went to regular high schools, you know, for financial reasons, to study one year less.

I was friends with Vesa Kiselkova, she used to sleep over at

our place. She became a doctor afterwards like another classmate of ours, Dobri Kiprova - a very good doctor.

Now I cannot find any of my friends, though earlier, in the years following 1989, all of us here in Sofia were gathering, playing bridge - well, some were watching, others were playing; it was a regular, weekly thing. Some came from Israel, as well. Many from our class live there. Some people we used to see and talk to on the phone long before 1989, and then we resumed seeing each other after our children grew up.

**Elka:** As Mom used to say, only Communist Jews remained in Bulgaria after 1944. Those from wealthy families, like most of the College students, have gone. Yes, they did occasionally come back after 1989, but not permanently.

**Lily:** A classmate - Mati Levy - came to Bankya once, where my daughter had a cottage. We drove there with the Trabant of an acquaintance. Mati was bewildered - she had never seen a car like that before.

But yes, friendship was the most important thing; we girls loved each other dearly. We lived together in Tursko (the Turkish premises), the boys - in Chirashko (the Apprentices' premises). We only looked at each other from afar - on Sundays, 10:30 am during prayers, for instance. There were thrills of the heart and love letters sent with the help of the student waiters.



LILY ST. IVANOVA

Once upon a time there was another girl also named Lily Ivanova in our class. And in order to distinguish her from the other Lily Ivanova we called this one Lilyanka. And it seemed to us that this name expressed her character — she is so calm, silent and small. Nobody has ever heard her use a high tone — she is always in low tones.

One can never tell what Lily thinks about in class or outside of class. Not even her friends! There is always a shadow of a smile on her face which doesn't show her feelings, but only ask a favor of her and she is ready to do it.

Our teachers were very good, you see, as in good people; you could rely on them, ask for advice. Unlike most students, I was very fond of Miss Steele. I had no problems with her being very strict. During our last year at the College, she lived in the same building as us. We were sleeping in smaller bedrooms by then, only a few girls in each. Miss Steele taught Latin, which I studied in addition to French and English.



Maria Alexandrova Dr. Floyd H. Black Mati Levi

Dimiter (Mitko) Lambrinov left the College when they opened the military academy, and met and became friends with my husband there. Unlike Mitko, my husband

had voluntarily enrolled in the military academy. His father was in the military, too. I met my husband at a horse race. He was a cavalier. A classmate from the College, also in the military academy, introduced us.

The “unreliable” soldiers were sent there - to Elhovo, Zvezdets, Malko Tarnovo.

**Lily, how did your life go in the first years after graduating from the College?**

After graduating I went to Vienna to study at university.

**Elka:** ...and instead of staying there afterwards, she returned to Bulgaria.

**Lily:** My brother, the eldest child in the family, also went to university in Vienna after graduating from the High School of Commerce. Afterwards, he came back to Bulgaria and worked in a cooperative. We could not find good jobs.

From Vienna I went first to Berlin, where I had friends from Pernik studying there. One night, it must have been 1943, I had just had dinner with a friend of my brother's, who was a doctor in Berlin at Charite Hospital. He was walking me home, and right then, the first bombing of Berlin by the Russian army took place. A few days later, I packed my bags. I got scared and went back home. It was terrifying there, too, but less so compared to Germany.

And soon after my return, on September 9, 1944 - a complete change - and then all the difficulties with finding a job. We were doubly “faulty:” my husband, a royal officer, and I, an American College graduate. It was scary: I did not dare show my diploma when applying for a job, and in the end I barely managed to find one in dry cleaning having used my connections. People cleaned and dyed their clothes there. We had to send Elka to kindergarten when I started going to work, we called them children's homes then. Next, I worked in Texim as a cashier and stayed there until my retirement. Texim was a very big shipping and trading company, an independent organization within the Bulgarian socialist economy.

**Elka:** The director was sued and sent to jail; it seemed the company's activity had begun to develop too much like that of a Western, non-socialist one. Alongside the company's all-encompassing activity, he had set up a dry-cleaning workshop across from Universiada Hall, in the shop area of the residential building opposite the hall, with machines imported from Germany, something new and unique for Sofia and Bulgaria. Most apparatchiks' drivers were bringing their clothes there to be dry-cleaned, with Western machines and Western detergents used for best results. And that was a small fraction of the whole activity of this enormous company.



1938 Girls' Basketball Varsity

Talking about connections, my father told me how when he applied to the military academy, the son of the Minister of War did not pass the exams and committed suicide as a result. There was no way to get accepted there without

the help of connections. The whole thing with connections came with communism; bananas were bought with connections, you needed connections for everything.

I just want to add, that when I was choosing a high school not only was there no American College, but my mother did not show in any way that she knew English. She never used the language for work or to get better job opportunities - it was a terrible thing to be an American College graduate. Only Leda Mileva was forgiven, because of her origin probably, but the College was not mentioned in connection to her.

**Lily, what makes you happy these days?**

My daughter and my granddaughter Lily, after her grandmother, my sun. When she was born in 1973 I left my job. My salary was meager anyway. Being an engineer, my daughter took a salary twice the size of mine, 100 leva.

**Elka:** I was to be sent to Simitli, everything was artificially distributed then. But since I was pregnant with my daughter I was spared. Moreover, my father was an excellent horse-racing athlete and his competitions were here in Sofia - generally, they avoided separating families - so, fortunately, the whole Simitli project fell through.

Once Lily was born, my mom suggested that she retire and stay home to look after her granddaughter and namesake. The alternative for infants with both parents working was to be sent to the so called weekly nursery or weekly kindergarten, which meant leaving your kid Monday morning and picking it up Friday after work or on Saturday. Can you imagine doing that with your 3-month-old? Maternity leave was only 3 months back then.

**Lily:** So that's what we did. Years later, when she started going to regular daycare, my granddaughter would ask, Grandma, pick me up before everyone else! There was another girl in her group, her grandfather was an

American College graduate, as well, and the two girls would compete who got picked up first.

The three of us moved in together not so long ago; this is why it is still such a mess, with so much stuff piled up, and I can't seem to find some photos I've been looking for for some time now. They were given to me by a young American teacher of mine, she had just recently arrived. She wrote on the back, I will never forget the Christmas (or was it Easter?) I spent with your family.

**Elka:** Lily runs a lovely little boutique for Italian clothes and jewelry. She went to the Russian school on Shishman street. As the College was not yet re-opened, this school was considered the best one. Next she studied International Tourism with Russian and English, only to find out after graduating that these kind of professionals were not in demand.

**Lily, what worries you these days?**

There's no calm, we're constantly scared by things on TV and everywhere. Good news is scarce.

**When will we have you over at ACS?**

Oh, we used to come regularly after the College reopened. But we are sort of old now. I was born in 1919, I am 97 now, I will be 98 in two months.

**What is your message to the future generations of ACS graduates?**

Make sure you enjoy these years when your only task and responsibility is studying!

*Petia Ivanova '97 met for an interview with Lilly Klyavkova in March of 2017. We were saddened to learn of Lilly's passing in 2018.*



1938 Choir

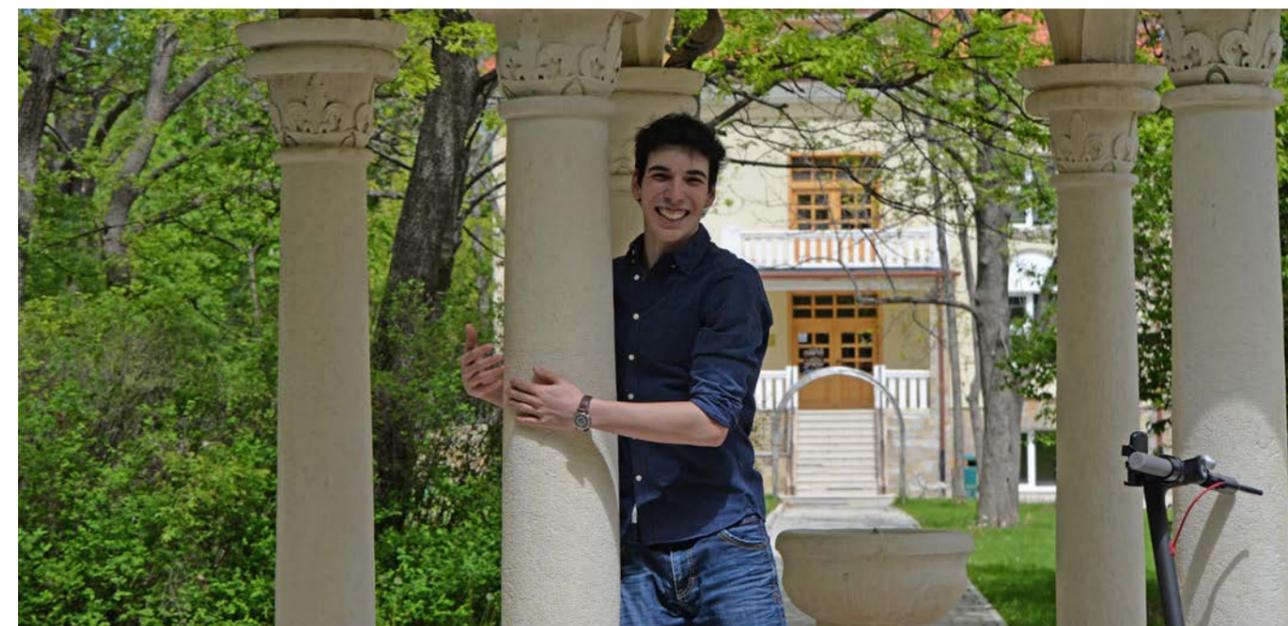


# TANIEL GULIAN '19:

*I Like Myself the  
Way I Am and I  
Don't Know If I  
Was Going to Be  
like That Had I  
Not Come to the  
College*

I first heard about Taniel Gulian of the wonderful Class of 2019 when he and a team of his peers won the Red Bull Soapbox race with their legendary vehicle "The Teacher" (Госпожата). As I was getting to know the graduating class who are now part of our alumni circle, I discovered that Taniel is a talented maker, engineer, and, well, fencer. He was an integral team member and a worthy ambassador of our community during the third Tikkun Olam Makers (TOM) Makeathon which we at the College had the honor and privilege to host in March 2019. In his senior year it appeared that the Student Computer Innovation and Fabrication Institute (SCIFI) had turned into his second home as I have heard stories of him spending the night there on multiple occasions. He is a chief organizer of FISSION and unconfirmed rumors speculate that he is also a talented meme-creator. As Taniel seemed to be a well-rounded student who is taking advantage of our new makerspace and its facilities on a grander scale, I felt like I wanted to get to know him better and share his story with the alumni community. He and I met for an interview shortly before his Graduation in May of 2019, so here is what he told me:

*Interview by Alexander Tomov '04*



**What is life like for 12th graders like you at the moment?**

Well, it is relatively intense. It is a little less so than the previous years, but we surely have a lot of tasks. Yes, I do have more time for side projects, but I am mainly focused on school.

**Where do you feel most "at home?"**

"Most at home" I feel in Math and Physics. English I will sit for in order to raise my grade, because we at ACS are well-prepared in this area and I think I will do well.

**I have my fingers crossed for you on all of them. What SAT are you taking?**

SAT Physics.

**Which brings me to the question, what is your plan for after Prom?**

The plan for after the prom is, I have a very cool idea, which I'm not sure will actually happen, but I want to try to launch a mobility service in Sofia if I manage to find funding.

I would like to try doing this during the summer, even though it seems impossible. Other than that – the beach, a little rest and after that – mechanical engineering in the UK.

**What are your best and worst days at ACS?**

Some of the worst days have been those with many tests that had great weight on our grade. There are such days every year and I don't know what year was the most important for me. If there was a test in Bulgarian that day, it almost certainly contributed to the day being "one of those."

**The best day?**

I don't know. I've had many great days, including FISSION. Last year I won it, this year I organized it.

The days after we won the Red Bull Soapbox Challenge, together with the boys and the "рочножа," were also very cool, because everyone was cheering us and I felt very happy back then. I had the support of many friends.

*"Now I like myself the way I am and I don't know if I was going to be like that had I not come to the College."*

**How did you end up going to ACS?**

Well, it was a little accidental. I came here from the Sofia Math High-School (SMG) and it so happened that my whole class didn't quite like our teachers there and we scattered. Many people from my class, I think 7 of us, applied to ACS and we all said, "Let's go to the ACS admission exam!" I applied and ended up getting in and my parents wanted me to study French. There is French here. Back then I didn't want to be in SMG, but I didn't want to be in a different school either. After all, I ended up at the College. It was a little by accident, but it worked out well. Now I like myself the way I am and I don't know if I was going to be like that had I not come to the College.

**Do you have many SMG friends here at ACS?**

Well, it happened that two of the guys I was with back at SMG signed up for French here and, together with the others, we became a whole section. This one guy and I have been studying together from 5th to 12th

grade. We missed only one year and we are very supportive of each other.

#### What do you value most in your friends?

Mainly that they stick with me in both good and bad times.

#### What would you like to take with you and what do you want to drop right here, right now?

Right now I'm dropping getting up early and staying up late. I am taking with me the knowledge, the friends, and the good times, for sure.

#### I don't want to bum you out, but getting up early and staying up late are quite typical for life at university.

I think I will be able to chill just a little bit more.

#### Or you will have a little better control of your daily schedule.

I hope so.



#### Everytime you are not in SCIFI, you are on a trotinetka, except for when you are with the trotinetka in SCIFI. What's with that? And is it a trotinetka?

Well, it actually is a trotinetka with an electric motor. Abroad it's called a scooter, but here a scooter means something else. It has to do with rising early. I discovered that I can get here much faster on the trotinetka, so I could sleep in just a little, and I gradually fell in love with riding it everywhere.

Why do I bring it down to SCIFI? Well, David (Yordanov) for one loves riding it too. This is how it started: I had a project in English where I made a bed from the Elizabethan era and some wood was left over from that. One winter I discovered a pair of old skis lying

around, so I decided to reuse the leftover materials. I used the skis and built a sled. As soon as I finished the sled, the snow melted. So I wondered what to do and I unmounted the front and mounted the scooter in its place and the sled turned into a road sled, with power coming from the scooter. It is actually still lying around SCIFI somewhere.

#### Have you been dexterous and handy since you were a kid?

Yes. My parents love to joke with that. My father is very handy with things. He works with watches and my mother is a musician, so you can guess who I take after. Apart from that, I think in math I'm taking after my grandfather and grandmother who are train engineers. So I have taken a little from everyone in the engineering field. And yes, I've been making things since I was very young. I started out with Legos. When I grew a little older, I discovered I liked 3D printing and making models. As a kid I tried to make a remote-controlled boat, and little by little, when I was around 10 years old, I first worked with a drill. My dad helped me and we made sure that my mom was away because she was very worried about me handling the drill.

#### *"I like to count on myself and that's why I like these kinds of things."*

#### What else are you doing?

Well, I played the piano and I used to sing in a vocal group when I was a kid, but then my voice changed and that stopped working. What I was really drawn to was fencing and I practiced very hard. When I got into ACS I had to cut down on the fencing. After that, it turned out that the people who I had trained with were heading the fencing club at the College so I was the club's president over the last 4 years. This is my sport, I like individual sports.

I like to count on myself and that's why I like these kinds of things.

#### Which teacher from ACS will leave the brightest memories for you?

If David is a teacher, then David. If he isn't then it's the Todorova twins in Computer Science and Math. Even though I've had classes with both of them over the past two years, I still can't tell them apart. They support us a lot and are constantly pushing us to make new projects. With Atanas Pashov of my class we took part in the IT Olympiad where we made an app that tells you how much plastic a product contains and it gives you tips on how to reduce your plastic use.

#### Both innovative and ecological!

Mr. Dinkov has also been an island of salvation because I like math, his classes were interesting, and I felt quite comfortable in them. He himself is quite an interesting person and it is a pleasure to have him as a teacher.

#### *"I hope I can help fix things in the future."*

#### Have you thought about where you want to live? Do you want to live abroad, do you want to stay here, or would you rather go abroad to study and then return?

Well, I want to come back. This is my home and I like it.

I hope I can help fix things in the future.

#### What makes you truly happy?

To be able to do what I want and to create things with my hands. This is something I adore doing. And when I'm doing it, I'm in heaven. It doesn't matter if I'm printing, making, gluing, cutting, or assembling something with electronics, woodwork, or metalwork - as long as I can turn my ideas into reality.

To be a maker makes me truly happy.

#### Are you going to miss the makerspace in SCIFI?

I will up to a certain point, but I want to build my own makerspace at home. I will bring ideas from here on how to improve my own.

#### Is there anything that has to do with ACS that you regret?

One of the things I regret is that I quit fencing because I used to have many friends there, but we've grown apart over time. We've grown together as a team and some of them have fenced successfully. One of the girls is now #3 in the world and was recently awarded her bronze medal. The others are also doing very well, especially in the European rankings.

I could have been there, but I think my vocation is not to be a fencer, but rather a maker.

#### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years I see myself having founded and launched a mobility business in Sofia. Yes, I will

be in Sofia most probably, and I will have my own makerspace. I want to be doing what I want to do, and create products that are useful to society. I'm not saying that making the Red Bull Soap Box isn't cool, but I want to make something that has a greater impact. I am very keen on developing ecological and technological solutions to the problems our environment faces. Otherwise, I'm also drawn to watchmaking, like my father. I don't know yet what road I will take, but I'm sure it will soon come to me.



#### How would you like to address the incoming 8th graders?

Get yourselves organized, learn to manage your time and prioritize. I was told the same, but I didn't believe it back then. Now I know it and I think I managed to get it done.

#### How does one succeed at ACS nowadays?

It is a lot of work and commitment. You need to be relatively good at all subjects that are taught here; there's no way for you to perform poorly in a class and pull off a good grade. It is very important that you take time to do your stuff and study..

#### Fair enough, so not a lot has changed in that respect. In a few days we will be welcoming you to the circle of distinct ACS alumni. What would you like to say to them as a fellow alumnus (at the time this interview will get published)?

It will be very interesting for me to meet ACS alums. They're all interesting people and I look forward to exchanging our ACS experiences.

*At the time of publication Taniel is a student at the University of South Hampton, pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He is part of the Southampton Formula Student Team and the Human Powered Submarine Team at his University.*

# LILIA VAZOVA

## '02:

*Graduating from a High School like ACS Gives One a Lot of Options and Choices About Schools, Career Paths, and Places to Live*

Lilia Vazova of the Class of 2002 is a Partner at the White Collar Defense and Investigations Group in New York City. She has a degree in Psychology from Trinity College in Connecticut and a Juris Doctor Degree from the University of Michigan Law School. Over the past 10 years she has been living and working in New York. I remember seeing her on campus back in the day and I was thrilled when fellow alumni started sharing articles about her success. It was then that I decided to get in touch with her and ask for an interview. I was overjoyed that she agreed and found the time in her busy schedule to answer some questions. Here is what she told me:

Interview by Alexander Tomov '04

*“But when I ended up getting into ACS, it felt like an opportunity to do something different instead of a more familiar or typical high school.”*

**Do you remember how you came to attend ACS?**

I recall it being a bit of a spontaneous decision. In the grueling ordeal that is high school entrance exams in Bulgaria, ACS wasn't much of a focus and I ended up applying on a whim, without much forethought or preparation. Frankly, I lived my life in the preceding two years thinking I would go to a German Language High School. But when I ended up getting into ACS, it felt like an opportunity to do something different instead of a more familiar or typical high school. To their credit, my parents left it entirely up to me, so this was probably the first quasi-adult choice I made in my life without their input.

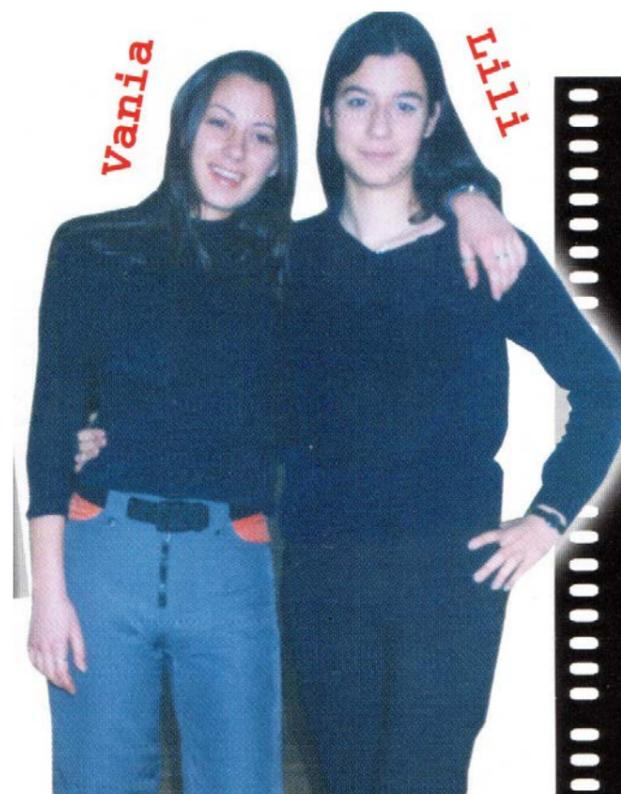
**What is your fondest memory of the College?**

I think the single best thing about ACS was that it was an intellectually rigorous, stimulating environment. Academically, it was first-rate, and the vast majority of my classmates were brilliant. It really pushes one to do their best - you have to just to keep up - which I think is so valuable when you are still young and impressionable, and it serves you well later in life.

**What about the worst one?**

Probably the flip side of what I just described: it was a fairly intense environment which, paired with typical adolescent dynamics, can be a lot for a teenager.

*“I think the extracurricular opportunities are one of the best things about ACS - it's such a wonderful opportunity to develop one's talents and interests, whether that be in sports, the performing arts, or something else.”*



Lilia as an ACS 11th grader in 2001

**What extracurriculars were you involved with during your time at ACS?**

The school newspaper, College Life, and the Yearbook. I think the extracurricular opportunities are one of the best things about ACS - it's such a wonderful opportunity to develop one's talents and interests, whether that be in sports, the performing arts, or something else. You learn how to take ownership and pride in your work, and you learn how to work as a team.

*“As any fellow alum or current student has probably experienced, ACS is sort of everywhere.”*

**When was the last time you returned to campus?**

Gosh, not for years - last time was probably an on-campus alumni event over ten years ago. As any fellow alum or current student has probably experienced, ACS is sort of everywhere. Last year, I was traveling in Southeast Asia with a friend, and we got to talking with a couple of American-looking, English-speaking fellow travelers in our hotel in Siem Reap, Cambodia. When they heard I was Bulgarian, they were delighted because they had both been teaching at a Bulgarian high

school until moving to teach in China a year earlier. You can probably see where this is going - the school was ACS and we had a lovely time reminiscing about our experience there (they said Bulgarian kids were the smartest students they had ever taught, by the way). It was wonderful to find common ground and connect with complete strangers over something so close to home.

**How did you get into law?**

That was another spur-of-the-moment decision. By my junior year of college, I was weighing my options of what to do next, and decided to apply to law school to see how that would fare out. I got into the University of Michigan, visited the school, liked it, decided to go there, and loved it. And here I am, ten years later, a grown-up lawyer.

**What is your proudest moment of your career so far?**

That's a hard question. I suppose the most obvious choice was being elected as a partner - that's a bit of an elusive goal at large law firms, especially so quickly - so I am certainly proud of that, coming from a different country and background and all that. A few weeks ago, I was featured among leading female trial lawyers at my firm in American Lawyer, the industry's most renowned publication, so that was pretty cool as law is a heavily male-dominated industry. I think the single proudest moment was when a young

*"I think the single proudest moment was when a young lawyer told me, "I want to be you." Her telling me she had learned from me and looked up to me was the single best thing I have heard in my career."*



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SF Committee: Lili, Ms.Ham, Mary, Maria, Anneke, Ivanka, Elena G., Elena D., Veronica, Pryia

**What is your most teachable career moment?**

It's hard to pick a moment per se. You are always up against a new experience, a new challenge so you are always growing into a new role and rising up to a new challenge. It can be exhilarating and exhausting at the same time. What I have learned along the way is that one probably knows more than they realize, and that most work challenges can be overcome with hard thinking and hard work. And in the meantime, "fake it till you make it" is always a useful motto to live by.

**Do you keep in touch with fellow alumni?**

I do. There is a sizable contingent here in New York. I try to see a couple of my closest friends from ACS even though we are scattered around the world.

**What would you say is your most marked characteristic?**

Probably my sense of responsibility and commitment to people and things I care about, like my family and my job.

**Would you change something about yourself if you could?**

I suppose I could chill out a bit, so if I could change one thing about myself, it would probably be that.

**What do you most value in your friends?**

That they are good, smart people I learn from and admire.

**What is it that you most dislike about people?**

Lack of integrity. Lack of empathy. Dealing with your insecurities by putting others down.

**What would you like to say to the fellow alumni (hopefully) reading this?**

Graduating from a high school like ACS gives one a lot of options and choices about schools, career paths, and places to live. I hope they are happy with the choices they made, and how they live their lives. And Merry Christmas!



Lilia at her Graduation from the University of Michigan Law School in 2009.

December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
Friday



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# ROUMYANA IVANOVA:

*What Makes Us  
Special Is the  
Students and the  
Hard Work that  
the Teachers Put In*

For the 22nd edition of the ACS Alumni Magazine I had the honor and pleasure to interview one iconic ACS teacher. A quick calculation shows that roughly a thousand of us have been in her classroom as 8th graders and some of us even met with her again as 11th graders for the SAT preparation elective. On her 25th anniversary as an ACS educator, we present this interview with ESL Department Chair Ms. Roumyana Ivanova.

Interview by Alexander Tomov '04



Ms. Ivanova handing out certificates with final exams results to preps at the end of their school year, May 2015.  
Photo by Zornitsa Haidutova.

#### **When and how did you come to work at ACS?**

I applied twice. The first time I was asked to apply again a year later as there wasn't an opening. One year later in June of 1994, I again called Dr. Whitaker who said he remembered me and that he'd love for me to meet the ESL department chair, Jill Snedden. Later in the evening I had a phone call with Jill Snedden. By the end of the conversation she asked if I were able to meet her in Sofia the next day. Remember that this is 8:00 PM on a weekday and I have to teach the next day. I had wonderful colleagues, so I called a couple of them and they helped. I went to the bus station at 5:30 AM but all of the early buses to Sofia were full. Fortunately, the driver for the 6:30 bus noticed me waiting for sometime and offered to take me in place of his ticket collector. When I arrived at the College, Roger and Jill invited me into his office for an interview. I distinctly remember the last question that Roger asked me: "If I called one of your students now, what would they say about you?" And I said: "That would depend on what grade they got from me last year. If they got a 5 or a 6, they'll probably say "Oh, she makes you work super-hard, but then you learn a lot." And then if they got a 3, which some of them did unfortunately, they'd say "Oh, she's so evil, she gave me a 3 last year and I don't know why." They offered me the job right after the interview.

#### **What was ACS like when you joined?**

When I joined ACS there were 3 grade levels. The first class was in grade 10, the second one was in grade 9 and I had the pleasure of teaching the third class

in grade 8. I remember grading a biweekly test over the weekend and returning it to my students the following Monday. Before I had said anything one of the guys raised his hand and asked "Ms. Ivanova, can we come to your room after school so you can explain the present perfect tense to us?" I was speechless. I had had some driven students, but not quite to that extent. I told them that was unnecessary and that I had practice exercises prepared. He said "we thought that you wanted to go ahead with whatever the curriculum says we should be doing, and maybe we can come after school and you could explain it to us." Those students were extremely proud to have made it to the College, they were aware of this being the opportunity of a lifetime. I would describe an ACS student as somebody that comes from a family that values education, regardless of their means. To these families education is a value, a virtue, a goal. Back then there was no other school of this caliber and there still isn't. What makes us special is the students and

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*"What makes us special is the students and the hard work that the teachers put in."*

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the hard work that the teachers put in. It was different because you had to pay the tuition fee, which was tiny compared to what it is now, but it corresponded with the families' means. It was still hard to afford for many families, even though the College always, since day one, has offered financial aid to worthy students. I know

that there were many students that studied for free because the families were unable to pay even the \$600.

The College did not have all of our buildings during the first years. We had Ostrander, Sanders and Djerassi Hall. The Arts building, which is now gone, was in the back of the old Auditorium and was filled with classrooms. There weren't as many students, as there were no 11th and 12th graders. There was a better chance for students and teachers to get to know each other because of the numbers and also because the kids loved talking to teachers. They'd love to talk and ask teachers all kinds of questions.

*"It's never the same. I haven't had 2 weeks taken out of 2 random years be the same, let alone an entire school year."*

#### Do you have a favorite class? ☺

I don't have a favorite class, although I know you want me to say "2004." Every class that I have taught has taught me things like planning, giving detailed instructions, and being explicit about goals. In the past 10 years, I have had to explain more about why we do certain things. If the students know my reasons then they're going to be more willing to give the effort. A lot of my friends, who are not teachers, are amazed that I've been a teacher for so long. I always tell them "It's never the same. I haven't had 2 weeks taken out of 2 random years be the same, let alone an entire school year." You have to adjust your expectations and your explanations as an educator so that the students are having a profitable time in the classroom. You always have to gauge their level so that they are a bit challenged, but not so that they feel as if they can't do it. I always tell them "You have to be slightly uncomfortable in my classroom. If you start liking me too much, I'm doing something wrong." As Vygotsky put it back in the 1920s, "the zone of proximal development is the place where you cannot function without the support of an adult. That's where the learning happens." You're going to be pushed from your comfort zone to a slightly higher level where I'll guide you. I like to interweave this theory with what I'm teaching because I very much believe in it.



2015 Teacher debate

#### What do you most value in your work at ACS?

Probably the most valuable thing about being a teacher at the College is that it's a constant learning experience. I remember when I first came to work at the College I didn't know which side of the computer you sit on. I never had any reason to try to work on a computer. I remember going to the library and seeing a lot of the international teachers sitting there and happily typing away on the keyboards. I felt like a complete loser. So I went up to Matt Brown, one of the international teacher colleagues, and asked him for help. He took me to the computer lab and showed me how to start a document, and I even typed one exercise for my students. That was one big achievement for me. I was 32 when I first used a computer and I can say that I've come a long way. I went to every class that any IT teacher ever offered for improving your computer skills. Sometimes it was a repetition of what I already knew, but it was reassuring that I knew the right stuff. Then other times it was learning how to do formulas in Excel and then, of course, in Google Sheets. It was so empowering to be able to do that and to be able to show my students how to do that.

Seven years ago, in 2012, I heard about Formative Assessment for the first time. A large group of us went to a professional development conference in Vienna, Austria. We were there to hear from Dylan Wiliam, a Welsh guy who did an awful lot of research on formative assessment, including field research for 14 years. This radically changed the way I teach for the better.

Another book that we read for professional development was *Teach like a Champion* by Doug Lemov. I recommend this book to anybody who teaches at any level because he has a number of different techniques to make sure you are involving your students. Lemov's "bellringers" are great activities that get students to start thinking about what is going to happen in the classroom that day.

This year we're focusing on developing caring relationships in and out of the classroom and that's valuable because the kids need to know that you care. You can be tough, you can be strict, but when they know you care they will trust you.

#### What is the life of the ESL Teacher & Department Chair like?

Teaching in the ESL department is such a blessing. I love the new students, because they are so wide-eyed and excited, and happy to be here. You do not want to misuse or abuse their enthusiasm. You want to harness it and use it for positive experiences for them. It is also not very easy at times, because the kids come in with different backgrounds, from all kinds of different schools in and out of Sofia. They have formed their attitudes and behaviors to some extent already. Many of those attitudes and behaviors are not necessarily right. Whenever someone makes a mistake and another person giggles, I stop teaching

and I step right in the middle and say: "We are not in the business of laughing at each other's mistakes. We are in the business of making sure no one makes mistakes. If I start laughing at your mistakes, I'm going to die of laughter in the course of one day."

Last year was my 20th anniversary as department head and my department organized a lunch party for me. We normally have a lunch party at the end of the school year, so I didn't realize it was anything different from what we had done the previous year. When we got to the restaurant, they had bought flowers and these beautiful earrings that I've been wearing since then. Every morning when I put these earrings on, I get this warm fuzzy feeling again. And I tell them, "I love these earrings because they remind me of the fact that I'm appreciated." That's what we're here for, to get appreciation from the people around us, for a job well done, especially when they are very honest about it.

Being the department chair has taught me a lot about managing people. At first I had to read a couple of books on the subject but then I realized this is like interacting with your students. I'm proud to say, in the ESL department operates by consensus. If there is one person who is not sure, we keep talking about it, we keep tweaking it until we agree. It may sound like it takes a lot of time for us to come to an agreement, but it doesn't. We trust each other.

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

One thing I'd like to see happening differently is having more continuity from one grade level to the next, and

a stronger sense of responsibility the older you get. Something is not happening that should be happening. In my high school we looked up to the senior class and the senior class looked out for us 8th graders. In the cafeteria there would be a line, and the 9th graders would all be jumping the line. There would be one senior who would keep watch to prevent this from happening and give us right of way because otherwise we'd never get our lunch. When our 8th graders during Prep Week are doing their shoe game, our seniors are lined up around that field and laughing at them. Now we are forced to do this game inside the bubble, so that it's only us there and no one can come and make fun of us. I understand that this is a disease of Bulgarian society as a whole, but I also think that the College can counter this. I want my students to be better human beings for having interacted with me and my colleagues at the College. If I manage to instill one good quality in every kid that I teach, I feel as if my job is done.

#### What would you say to the alumni?

Don't forget about the College, even if you did not have the best experience. Those were necessary sacrifices on the road to success. Let me hear more of "This class, on their 5th Graduation anniversary, collected 500,000 leva for the College." It should be possible with the level of success I know many of you have met. And yes, find me on Facebook, let me know what is going on in your lives. You know what is going on in mine, I'm just teaching students.



By Georgi Iliev  
Director of Annual Giving

# OUR ALUMNI GET IT

Our alumni get it. Education can be so much more than the curriculum passed down by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education. The American College excels at providing what is possible above and beyond the classroom. Our alumni know this because they experienced it while at ACS.

That is why they give.

Alumni give to Financial Aid - to get the kids of Bulgaria out of ordinary classrooms and into the great learning spaces of ACS.

Alumni give to Student Activities - because they know that true imagination and inspiration take flight in extracurriculars, whether it's a rehearsal for the ACS musical, an Astronomy or Biotech club, or a basketball game in the Bubble.

Alumni give to Excellence in Teaching - because they are wise enough to know that when teachers are empowered and appreciated it makes all the difference in their approach with students.

Alumni give to Unrestricted Funds - because they trust this school to allocate their support where it is needed most.

Financial Aid, Student Activities, Excellence in Teaching, Campus Improvement, and Unrestricted are all the giving categories on <https://acs.bg/giving/donate/>.

Thank you for giving back! You get it.

*Here is a summary of the 2018-19 alumni giving campaign:*

*Total gifts:*

*48,705 leva*

*Number of alumni who gave:*

*118*

*Champion class with largest sum of donations:*

*Class of 2002 with 18,500 leva and 16%*

*participation rate*

*Top 3 most popular giving categories:*

*53% unrestricted; 37% financial aid; 5% student activities*



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