



ACS ALUMNI MAGAZINE



Issue 25, July 2024

STOYAN TRENCHEV '16

Leo LeviEFF '43

Dr. Daniella Molle '97

Teodora Todorova





The American College of Sofia

ACS ALUMNI MAGAZINE

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Photo by Stoyan Trenchev '16

Outer back cover – ACS Trustee
Vesselin Arnaudov '01 addresses
the Class of 2024 at their
Commencement Ceremonies

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Alumni,

I hope the receipt of our annual summer message evokes something special. While most of you are well moved into a seasonal cadence that no longer includes a respite between one academic year and another, I imagine most of you can easily remember a time when it did. For those of us who are lucky enough to have ACS as part of our present, it is the summer that continues to call attention to the celebration of achievements of one year in anticipation of a year ahead. It is absolutely summer here – exams are complete, summerschool has descended, annual renovations and improvements have begun, and most are on holiday.

I invite you to read this edition with a sense of pride that there are over 3,500 alumni around the world doing amazing, worthwhile things. This year we welcomed 195 new members into this esteemed group, their stories are uniquely their own. Like your graduating class, among this group are individuals who have set their sights on universities and colleges in the US, Europe, and Bulgaria. And while for most their academic focus is identified, what they do with their undergraduate studies has yet to unfold. In a world that continues to require significant planning and goal setting, it is refreshing to be reminded that futures are full of surprises. This edition speaks to this certainty, with stories of your peers that span professions and contributions across the globe.

With almost twenty years between the graduation of Daniella Molle '97 (p. 10) and Stoyan Trenchev '16 (p. 16), Dani and Stoyan have found ways to make a difference. Within their stories are shared threads of research and greater good. For Dani, the greater good is creating space and ways for language to be accessible to all. For Stoyan, it is about finding space and ways to optimize how we harness the power of wind. As I read and reflected on their stories, it was difficult to not engage in my own personal reflection – and within this reflection there are shared threads with Teodora Todorova (p.21), Bulgarian Department Chair, who shares her own motivations for choosing a life of teaching and the joy that it brings by opening space that respects the need to be both informed and inspired so that what comes next is possible.

As always, we invite you to simply stay connected. We will continue to do our best to make this as easy as possible given your busy lives. For those who are in Sofia on July 26, reconnecting is yours



for the making at this summer's annual Alumni Reunion. We invite all to return to campus and to enjoy reminiscing with old friends and introducing yourself to new friends.

To close, I extend my warmest congratulations to all those who have achieved milestones, large and small – personal and professional – since leaving ACS. I have no doubt that the traits of commitment and perseverance that contributed to your success at ACS are the very traits that you bring to your chosen life's journey. We here at ACS, fellow alumni, and friends of ACS are eager to continue to support and celebrate your successes.

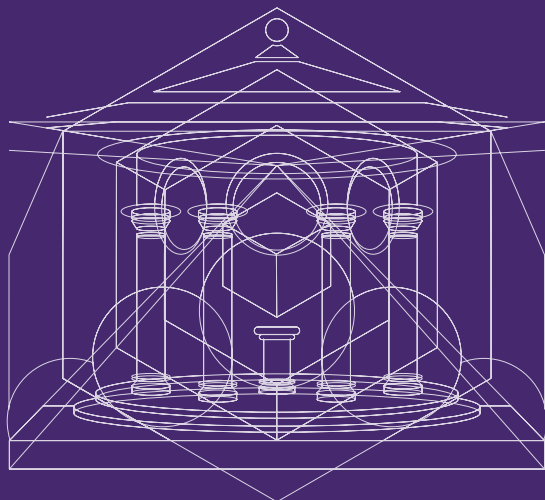
On behalf of many,

Emily Sargent Beasley

President

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Published by:
The ACS Development Office

Chief Editor:
Petia Ivanova '97
p.mironova@acsbg.org

English language consultants:
Nikoleta Stankova
Jan-Gordon Zagaya

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We welcome all readers' feedback,
submissions, and suggestions.

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Petia Ivanova '97

Dear Alumni,

It is with great excitement and anticipation that I present to you the latest issue of our alumni magazine. As I sit down to pen this letter, I am struck by the sheer magnitude of the impact our alumni community has made on the world. From groundbreaking scientific discoveries to innovative social initiatives, the stories of your achievements are truly awe-inspiring.

Choosing which stories to highlight is no easy task, as each and every one of you has a tale to tell that deserves to be shared. Sometimes, fate intervenes, and we are fortunate enough to have you reach out to us directly, as was the case with Valerie Levieff and Daniella Molle '97. Daniella reached out to set up an ACS scholarship: an amazing testament to the culture of giving the College strives to foster and alumni embody, the Robin Mittenthal scholarship was established in 2023. Other times, a chance encounter at an alumni reunion sparks a conversation that leads to a story worth telling, like the one we have with Stoyan Trenchev '16. And then there are those individuals who have been quietly making waves in their respective fields, whose stories we have been eager to share but have only now found the time to properly explore, such as that of Bulgarian language and literature teacher Teodora Todorova.

Regardless of the path that leads us to your story, I hope that you, our dear readers, will find inspiration in the tales we have chosen to feature in this issue. Whether it is the story of a fellow alumnus who has made a significant impact in their field or one that speaks to the power of perseverance and resilience, my sincere wish is that these stories will ignite a spark within you, and why not even a spark to share your own journey with us.

In a world that has been forever changed by the events of the past few years, it is more important than ever to stay connected and to support one another. I encourage you to reach out to your fellow alumni, to engage with the ACS community, and to return to campus whenever you can. Your stories and your presence are what make the College truly special.

Finally, I cannot help but marvel at the advancements in technology that have made it possible for us to seamlessly connect with one another and conduct interviews over Zoom, no matter what corner of the world we've made our home. Thank you, world of 2024.

Stay well, stay in touch, and keep making us proud.

Sincerely,

Petia Ivanova '97

PORTRAIT OF A FATHER: LEO LEVIEFF '43

As Remembered by Daughter Valerie Levieff

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

It was in the summer of 2023 that US-based Valerie Levieff got in touch with the College to ask if we had any records of her father Leo Levieff who had been a student back in 1937-1942. The school did have records of Leo. As we shared those with Valerie over the summer, we were impressed by the remarkable job she had been doing of remembering her father's life story including details of his time at the College and Bulgaria. We were thrilled when Valerie enthusiastically agreed to share her many fond memories of her dad in a Zoom interview from her home in Connecticut.



Leo in freshman year in the Yearbook, 1940

How did you come to contact us? What made you think of the American College of Sofia in 2023?

A couple of months ago I was telling my coworkers how my father had a cousin, a skier, who went to the Olympics representing Bulgaria. I looked him up online to see if there was any mention or any record of this cousin, David Madjar. I remember my dad sharing with me that David, or Davico as they used to call him, was a great skier and competed in the Olympics. Indeed, there was mention of him representing Bulgaria in the 1948 Winter Olympics. Somehow from that link I came to one of the pre-war alumni interviews – featuring Dimiter Lambrinov, Class of 1939 – where Davico is referenced. There was even a photo of him, as well as one of another cousin of my father's, Daisy Leviev. That's how the whole thing started. And I said, let me see if there's any record of my dad. I didn't even know if the school still existed at that point, but I thought I would look. I did a little research online and I saw an email address. You never know, right? Honestly, I thought I was going to get a response like, Oh, thank you for your inquiry, but unfortunately we don't have any record. After all, that was so many years ago. I didn't expect to get a response, much less have it lead to something so wonderful. But you did reply that you had a record of him and it was such a wonderful surprise when you sent me those photos.

You shared that your father described his life in Bulgaria including his time at the College for you. What are some things you recall?

I was close to my dad and often when we'd be talking or spending time together, I would ask him questions about his childhood or different memories. I remember him saying that he was born at home on *Tsar Kaloyan nomer pet*. That was the first home they lived in and then sometime later they moved to Tsar Boris.

My father, friends and colleagues always say that I have a wonderful memory. My father would say, how do you remember **that**? I tried to hold on to as much

information as I could, but over the years, I tried to write things down so I would have all those memories from my dad.

He told me about those street names and that his dad was a physician, an ophthalmologist, like him. He told me his parents were “matched”, as in arranged marriage, as was common back then. His mom was one of ten children and came from a very wealthy family. My grandfather was more middle class, and one of eight children. He became a physician, and he was very well respected because he was a hard worker. They lived on 5, Tsar Kaloyan St. and his dad would see patients at his office in the morning and then go to the municipal hospital in the afternoon. He would walk to the bus stop and he'd come home midday, have lunch, take a nap, and then he'd go back to either the hospital or his office.

My dad was named Leo after his grandfather, Leon. I have a picture here somewhere. This was in 1937 in Bulgaria, skiing. That's my dad and my grandfather.



Leo and his dad, 1937

And this was a baby picture of my dad. I love it. It's my favorite. I said, “Dad, you were so cute!” He replied, “Babies are cute.” I said, “No, look how cute you are with your hair and your little outfit.”



Like an angel.

Yeah, a little chubby. Funny, since he was always very slim.

Oh, this was in Bulgaria, too. This girl was Mary Danone. It was some costume party, I think, in 1931.

My father was 8 years old then. Purim is what he called it; a Jewish holiday typically celebrated around March.



Leo and a friend on Purim, 1931

Sometimes I recall these little things, little memories. Like how my dad told me he often knew when it would snow because in the morning as he was waking he'd hear the “ting-ting” of a horse and carriage. That was his way of knowing it snowed that night because on snowy days people would occasionally take a carriage instead of walking. I remember him saying that they put a nice warm blanket on his lap in the carriage. Anytime it would snow here I would say “ting-ting” and we would laugh at this random little memory of Bulgaria.

He talked about the climate – how he loved the beautiful climate of Bulgaria. Often in the States, summers can be nice, but they can also have a lot of humidity, which makes it unpleasant to be outside. He would always recall how the weather in Bulgaria was a dry heat, and that he enjoyed summers on the Black Sea with his mom, his aunt, and his cousin. That was always a nice memory of the seaside summers and the climate.

These are my grandparents in Bulgaria. Look at the coat and the hat.



Leo's parents in downtown Sofia

Dad talked about different foods like the two cheeses, sirene and kashkaval. I tried to ask him about favorite foods such as *shamfustuk* (pistachios). He said in Bulgaria people also like to eat lamb.

He talked about *martenitsa* at the beginning of spring, how people wore a little bracelet of two little knitted dolls, male and a female, what were their names?

Pizho and Penda.

Yes. Red and white, made of yarn. I tried to look for something like that and found a similar bracelet (*showing a lovely sample of bracelet martenitsa to the camera*), just as little memorabilia. I got us each one. I would say, “Dad, put on your bracelet, it’s martenitsa!”. My friends and coworkers would hear all about our traditions. I talk about my dad so much because he was so special to me. The first thing people would always ask, “How’s your dad?”, because they knew he was such a huge part of my life.

Dad also told me about the holidays. He was Jewish. Both of his parents were Sephardic Jews but they didn’t really practice Judaism. He told me about Dyado Mraz, your version of Santa Claus. I think his mom was a little more religious, she maybe fasted for Yom Kippur, but his dad not so much. My dad was not particularly religious growing up. He had a bar mitzvah and he got a bicycle and a gold watch from his grandfather, which was a big deal. The family didn’t have a Christmas tree, but his parents would decorate a chandelier festively for the holiday season as a surprise for him.

He taught me certain words over the years. It’s funny because even though he didn’t have an opportunity to speak Bulgarian regularly, on occasion certain words and expressions would come easily. Often when we were out to dinner, for example, when he got the bill, he would add it up counting in Bulgarian. This is how I learned different numbers.

“They had one special day called Mountain Day and it was a surprise when it happened. They would wait for it all year and then one morning the announcement would come.”

Sometimes he’d say *osem i osem shestnaiset*, and I would say what about *sedem i sedem, pet i pet* and it was kind of like a little quiz, we’d always joke this way. I made a copy of them here just to refresh my memory, and to perfect my accent. *Chetirinaiset, deset, devet, osem, sedem, shest, pet, chetiri, tri, dve* (counting backwards in Bulgarian: 14,10,9...2).

He taught me simple little greetings, like *Kak si, Kak se kazvash, Dobre*.

He told me about the former national anthem, *Shumi Maritsa*. When we would hear the current national anthem my dad would often remind me about *Shumi Maritsa*. On a couple of occasions, I would find it and play it for him to see if he remembered the words.

He told me about the Bulgarian flag, how it was white, green, and red, and what each color represented: white standing for peace, green for agriculture and prosperity, and red for independence or freedom. When the Olympics would be on, and they’d have the opening ceremonies, we’d be waiting for Bulgaria to come out with their flag.

I would always try to catch any type of mention of Bulgaria. My dad was a big tennis fan so whenever Grigor Dimitrov would be playing, we would watch and root for him. He also would mention Bulgaria produced a lot of famous weightlifters.



American College Tennis Club, Leo is first from right, standing, 1940

He told me about Alexander Nevsky Square. I think I might have a picture of it here somewhere.

Here are some old drawings and paintings from Bulgaria that belonged to my grandfather. I believe a patient of my grandfather’s sketched this one that I love. And here is one of the typical Bulgarian folk attire. When my father passed away, I wanted to hold on to all those types of memories. They mean so much to me now.

Have you ever been to Bulgaria, Valerie?

No, never.

Hopefully, you would come someday. Just imagine walking on Tsar Kaloyan Street and then Tsar Boris Street and the Alexander Nevski Square and seeing for real a place that you have been imagining a certain way, and maybe have seen in pictures now.

Yes, I would love it. When he would talk about something from his childhood, I’d ask, “Was that from *Tsar Kaloyan nomer pet*?” I would laugh at how the street numbers are after the street there and before the street here. Often if we would order a pizza he’d say, “This is Levieff from Sandpiper 1” and I’d say, “No, Dad, you have to say the number first.” There were certain things he reverted back to, certain words, and even though he came to the US in 1950 and lived here until he passed away in 2019, he still had an accent and in certain words it would be more apparent than in others.

Do you know how your father ended up at the College or how he learned of the school? Was it through his cousins or was there something else, as well?

I’m not sure. He was an only child. His parents must have seen this as a good institution for him. I imagine the fact that it was American and founded originally by missionaries must have been very appealing as an educational foundation for my dad. It was private, with a good reputation but still located in Sofia. He would also have an opportunity to practice and improve his English there – that must have made it seem like a good fit. For sure, it also mattered that he had family there.

Did he tell you stories from his time at the College? What were the emotions they evoked in him?

He did share wonderful memories of being there. One of them was Mountain Day. My dad would tell me about the Headmaster, Floyd Black, and about how hard they studied. He would always joke about how in the States we don’t study the way he did growing up in Bulgaria. You know, it was much stricter. They studied hard and did not have much free time. But they had one special

day called Mountain Day and it was a surprise when it happened. They would wait for it all year and then one morning there would come an announcement and students would chant, "Mountain Day, Mountain Day," and it's the big day when they would go hiking up Vitosha Mountain. It was also the one day when the boys and the girls would socialize together.

He talked about being in the school band. Here is a picture of him with the big drum in the middle.



American College school band – Leo on the drum

He remembered one occasion when the students went to a movie. An American musical movie called *On the Avenue* (1937). It was a big memory for him. He loved American movies.

He talked about Christmas carols. Always at the holidays, when he would hear all the American Christmas carols, he would say how he learned them from his time at the American College. It always brought back nostalgia when he heard those songs of his time there.

And how did he get from Bulgaria to the U.S.? Did he pass through other countries on his way? Tell us of his journey.

His parents pulled him out of the College his senior year, it must have been 1942, and sent him by train to Switzerland – I believe it was the Orient Express. When he arrived in Trieste, Italy – it was considered safe once you made it that far – he sent a telegram, "Bien arrivé" to his parents. This was his way of letting them know he was safe.

Before arriving in the States in 1950, he spent eight years in Switzerland. A cousin of his was waiting for him at the train and had reserved a little pension where my dad would reside. He went to the University of Lausanne where he studied to be a doctor. That's where he learned to speak French fluently. It was hard because it wasn't his first language, and all the exams were in French. He had wonderful memories of his time in Switzerland.

I always took the opportunity to find something that was nostalgia for my dad. I would look up a movie or try to find something that he would appreciate from his past. For example, in the movie *Casablanca* there's a scene where a couple is in Casablanca and they're trying to get visas to come to the States. In this scene, the young girl goes to the main character played by Humphrey Bogart and says, "Please help us, we come from Bulgaria." My dad would joke, "They don't look Bulgarian at all!"

In 1950, my dad arrived by ship from Switzerland to Hoboken, New Jersey. The ship was called the New Amsterdam. He had a classmate, an American classmate from Switzerland, who met him upon arrival and had secured a room for him in Manhattan. He vividly remembered how upon arrival in New Jersey, there was a song playing "Good Night Irene" by The Weavers. Often, we would play that song, and it brought him back to the moment when he arrived in the U.S. When he came into Manhattan, he had this long coat from Bulgaria. His friend said, "Leo, you have to get rid of that coat," and took him shopping for a more fashionable overcoat.

He lived in Manhattan during his residency and internship. He loved New York City and that time of his life. He had to take a test to show his medical knowledge which he passed. It was impressive to me that he passed these exams multiple times in several languages that were not native to him. Years later, when I was an adult, occasionally we'd go into New York City and he would say, "Oh, I know this city cold."

Eventually, my grandparents from Bulgaria came to the States. They had moved to Israel first while my father was in Switzerland. Then some years later, my dad sent for them, and they came to the States where he secured them a little apartment in Manhattan.

There was one memory from back when my dad was in the Navy. He loved his time in the service, where he stayed for two years. He said they treated him very well. He was a full Lieutenant, a medical officer, who had two stripes. There was a time when his parents were in France at the same time my dad's ship was in port there. He said he went to his commanding officer, asking permission to go and see them, having been separated for some years now. His commanding officer said, "Yes, you go, and if for some reason you're detained, we'll fly you back." He went to meet his parents and arrived there in his U.S. Navy uniform, and everybody started to cry. They opened a bottle of champagne to celebrate this memorable moment.

Years later, we were on vacation in the Caribbean, and we had to take a little boat from one island to the next. I remember sitting there and I said, "Oh, I don't feel well." My dad replied with: "Not me, it feels great! It reminds me of my time in the Navy."

Eventually, my dad moved to Connecticut, close to New York. I think someone had suggested that it might be a good place to open up a practice. We lived in Westport, Connecticut but he opened his practice in a town called Stratford, about 20-25 minutes from where we lived. I think it was 1959. I only remember that because he practiced for 40 years and he retired in 1999.

He had his office, and provided surgeries out of one of the local hospitals. At one time he taught medical students at Yale University, which was close to his office. It was at Yale where he met my mom who was working as a lab assistant. She said, "He was this handsome young doctor." Even though he was older than my mother, my dad was always very youthful looking. When he was in his sixties, people thought he was in his forties; even up until the latter years, he didn't really get too much gray hair. His father's hair remained dark to the end.

In this picture you see my dad, Daisy and Joe, who is Davico's older brother at a get-together in New York City. Years later, in 2009, my dad and I went to Paris to visit Charlotte, Davico's sister-in-law, who was living there. It was wonderful.



Joe, Daisy '39, and Leo Levieff

And here is a picture with Davico with my dad's parents on both ends.



Leo (second from left), Davico (third from left), and Leo's parents

My dad came from a big extended family. Although he was an only child, he had many aunts, uncles and cousins. I, again, would always try to remember the family tree. There was Leon and Victoria and Isidor and Albert. I would try to remember the names, who was married to whom, who had which child, and what they did for a living.

I don't know if he managed to stay in touch with other people from the College but he did tell me about the gentleman that was the pioneer of the birth control pill, Carl Djerassi. With the popularity of the internet, my dad and I would often sit on the couch, and he would be remembering things and I would look them up – names, places, even the American College. We would see old pictures and he'd say, "Oh yeah, that's him or her and that's that place where we did so and so..."

I know he'd be so thrilled that I'm talking with you and that I'm sharing all these memories and experiences. He wasn't one to talk about himself, but I know he'd be so, so thrilled.

Tell us more about Leo as a person. I have gathered by now that he was reliable and hardworking, that he was taking good care of his family. What made him happy? What inspired him? Were there things he feared?

His family was most important to him. My parents

divorced and my dad raised us four children. Back in the 1970s when my parents divorced, it wasn't common that a father would raise children alone. Even though we saw my mother and she was in our life, we stayed with my dad. People were always surprised, as it was not common. He took care of the four of us and he took care of his parents when they came here. He supported his parents because he wanted to reciprocate all the opportunity and support his parents had given to him. He took care of the four of us while maintaining his profession and running a successful practice. When my grandfather passed away, my grandmother moved to a home for the elderly, close to where we lived. My dad would take all four of us on the weekend to go see her and spend some time there visiting with her. So yes, his family was very important to him. I think one of the main reasons why it was so important for him to have the four of us with him was that he came to this country alone and we were his whole family. He had colleagues and friends, but he didn't really socialize so much outside of his profession with friends. Even later on when he retired and had more time, his family remained his whole life. His family brought him the most happiness. With that said, his kids were what he worried about most, with our safety and security his top priority.

“His family was very important to him. He came to this country alone and we were his whole family.”

Dad was a straight arrow. He did “everything by the book.” He was honest and always tried to do the right thing and be fair. He would joke and say, “Oh, I was such a fuddy-duddy,” he never got into trouble or participated in risky things. And I said, “Dad, that’s just who you are, those are good qualities.” And he would reply, “No, I should have been a little less serious, not followed the rules so much.”

A funny memory from Bulgaria comes to mind as I describe him as being very strait-laced. One time he did get into trouble: he was with a friend, and they jumped off a cable car. A friend of his father happened to see them, and my dad got in trouble. That was the one thing he did. I was like, “Dad, I think in the scheme of everything, you’re okay!”

He was a wonderful father. I was so fortunate. I have friends and people I know that don't have that. Maybe their father wasn't really involved in their lives, or they grew up very differently. Even though I came from a divorced family, I always felt very safe and loved and nurtured. My dad had so much on his plate and people are still amazed at how he took care of four kids on his own and managed. He was there for the school meetings, sports events, camp, doctor's appointments and everything in between. I remember he always made sure we had what we needed for the new school year. He would come in our bedrooms and say, “Okay, let's make a pile. This stuff fits and this stuff doesn't. And what do we need? Two pairs of pants and so on...”

He discovered and grew to love the Caribbean. He loved that balmy climate, he loved summer. Especially as he got older, he did not like the winter and the cold. He found it very depressing with the trees bare, the cold, and not being able to go outside. He discovered the Caribbean once after getting bad strep throat.

He had been sick and was just recuperating when he went to a travel agent who sent him to the Caribbean, the Bahamas or Trinidad, one of the islands. He said he got off the plane and the doors opened in this warm climate and the breeze; he said it was like paradise. He used to take us when we were young. Every winter we'd go on vacation, whether it was Jamaica or another one of the islands. Again, that's not easy, traveling with four kids, keeping them entertained on the plane and breaking up disagreements among sisters and brothers.

There's six years between all of us, from the oldest to the youngest. My sister Caroline is the oldest. Then I have a brother, David, who's three years younger than her, then me, a year younger than David, and then my younger brother, Philip, who is two years younger than me. So, there's six years between all of us, from the oldest to the youngest. We all loved my father and were close to him. I spent most of my time with him just listening. We'd listen to music, and we would talk about him growing up. I just tried to soak in as much as I could because I never wanted to forget anything. I wanted to hold on to all those memories. And maybe I did that because some day I would be able to share this.

Thank you, Valerie, for doing this and for keeping all those lovely memories. And what would you say was Leo's father superpower?

I guess I'm biased because he was my father, but he was very smart, a hard worker, and very responsible. Generous. He left all of us something, security. He saved, but also enjoyed some of the finer things like nice clothing. He always dressed very well. Later, he got himself a sports car. He loved that car. He definitely had an appreciation for the finer things but again the security of his family was most important.



And that's how you're like him, right?

Yes, I try to be. When I was a little girl, I always tried to keep the family harmony. My dad used to call me a "mother hen", telling me "That's not your job, you don't

have to worry about that." However, I did worry about my family and our harmony – my dad taught me that.

For some reason, I always tried to protect my dad; if I could help in some way, I would. It wasn't ever asked of me, but I think it was just because I felt so close to him that I wanted to protect him at any cost. I think it was because he had so much to do, so much on his plate that I stepped in to help.

What else would you like to share?

We mentioned some places that my dad loved. He had just gone back to Europe for the first time when he retired in 1999, so almost 50 years later. He went to Switzerland, France, and Italy. He loved it! Certainly, Paris was a favorite place. He loved everything about Paris and the south of France. He loved Italy and Switzerland too. When he went back to Switzerland for the first time, he went to the boarding house where he resided many years ago and took a picture right in front of the building. He never made it back to Bulgaria. I think everybody, all his relatives, had left by then, but he shared with me many wonderful memories of his time there.

He also loved music. He loved classical music. He loved jazz. He loved music from the Caribbean, calypso and reggae. He loved American music, all kinds of music, really. He had a big music collection. He loved Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Edith Piaf, Charles Aznavour, Yves Montand, you know, all singers of that time.

Anytime there was some mention of Bulgaria in the newspaper, like this one here (*showing a newspaper clipping to the camera*), we would clip it out and keep it. This one is about the Bulgarian roses – this was a while ago – and this here is about Sofia from back in 2012. As you see they are all yellowed old clippings I pulled together for this call.



Oh, and one last thing: Look at this newsletter from the American College dated October 1991. *Board of Trustees Votes to Reopen College* it says. It has a New York address and includes a letter from the President of the Board Robert C. Hubbard. It must have been right before they were reopening. And there's a photo of the old campus at the American College.

These are beautiful. Thank you. It's amazing how you've been holding on to them and taken them with you everywhere you went. Thank you for your time and for sharing your father's story and through it some of yours.

I was so happy about all of this. I've been talking about it with my friends, telling them how we're working on a piece about my dad. It makes me very happy. I hope your readers get a sense of my dad's accomplishments and his kind, caring nature. Perhaps this article will serve as a legacy of his time at the American College and spark some fond memories for students past and present. I would really like that.

DR. DANIELLA MOLLE '97:

I Want Each Child to See Themselves Reflected in What They're Learning

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

Daniella Molle or Dani as I know her, a fellow classmate of the Class of 1997, is a truly remarkable individual, embodying a rare combination of kindness and fortitude. In 2023, she established the Robin Mittenthal Scholarship at ACS, which covers the full tuition fee for the education of one Bulgarian student for the complete five-year term of education, offered with preference to a student from a minority, from a single-parent household or residing outside of Sofia, whose family has high financial needs. As Research Director at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education, she conducts qualitative research that can inform professional learning initiatives specifically designed for teachers of multilingual students. She is interested in designing and exploring different approaches to working with educators to support the academic success of multilingual students. She is involved in investigations of what educators learn during professional development, how they put that knowledge into practice, and how their practice facilitates the academic literacy development of multilingual students. She earned her doctoral degree from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It was an honor to converse with Dani about ACS, her life after graduation, parenting, education, and social justice.



Dani, what have you been up to since graduating ACS in 1997?

After I graduated from ACS, I went on to study Scandinavian Studies at Sofia University. I knew even before graduating, though, that teaching languages was my passion. My mother is a professor

of Bulgarian as a foreign language at Sofia University, the linguist in the family. My dad is an applied mathematician. He does a lot of statistics work and was also a professor at Sofia University before transferring to the University of Forestry. I think I got the linguistics gene from my mom and with the huge demand for lessons in English in Bulgaria

back then, I started working for an organization that provided instruction in English to its employees as soon as I graduated high school. Later, I moved to another organization and taught Business English to people working for Shell, Sofia Airport, etc. And I really enjoyed that.

In 2003, when I was done with the Bachelor's and Master's in Scandinavian Studies, I wanted to continue teaching English, but I felt that I didn't have enough training on how to be a good teacher. While an effective teacher, I was mostly improvising with no theory or formal training on teaching language. I really wanted to learn more and be a better teacher. And since I did not want to study pedagogy here in Bulgaria, nor did I want to join the English Department at Sofia University, both too traditional and too set in their ways for me, I started looking for places where I could pursue a Master's degree in teaching English as an additional language and get financial support. I looked at the UK, Australia, and the US. It was very clear from the very beginning that England wouldn't work out. Australia, too, was difficult for an international student, while the US was easier. And so I looked at rankings and specifically at rankings for programs that focused on teaching English as an additional language. And one of the programs was actually here at University of Wisconsin - Madison. So I applied there and to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, because they had a whole department focused on teaching English as an additional language. Madison admitted me, but with no guarantee for funding whereas the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign admitted me with guaranteed funding. So I was accepted as a teaching assistant (or TA), which means that my tuition was paid, I received a monthly stipend, and had health insurance. In other words, I could pursue my studies and be financially independent.

I came to the United States with the idea to get a Master's degree, and then return to Sofia and continue teaching English to adults. I really enjoyed the private company that I was working for before I left for the US. I felt valued and appreciated there. Coming here, I was terrified when I found out that I would have to teach academic writing. I had taught a lot of English and I was comfortable teaching English, but I had no preparation for teaching academic writing, which was what I was going to be a TA for. We had just one week of orientation and I felt there was no way this was sufficient for me. I had a lot of freedom in terms of how I taught the curriculum. The students were international graduate students and our department, the Department of English as an International Language, provided academic writing support to them as they were pursuing their careers in their fields: engineering, music, architecture, you name it. And writing is a big part of their academic careers. I started reading a lot to prepare and I went to the library a lot, which is where I met my future husband Robin, two days after I arrived.

It turned out that I loved teaching writing. I had never experienced this before but I loved it. At the end of the two-year Master's program, I had a choice of taking exams or writing a thesis to get a Master's degree. And I decided to write a thesis. I wanted to pursue a question that was of interest to me rather than learn a lot of content related to stuff that other people thought I should

be knowledgeable about. Because of my love for writing and since I was to teach writing, I had taken courses in the English Department in Composition and Rhetoric. There I met the person who became my advisor, who is amazing. Having a background in English as an additional language, he understood where I was coming from. He was a leading scholar in Composition and Rhetoric, very well known in the field and extremely supportive. I loved working with him.

The experience of writing my thesis in the second year of my Master's was completely transformative because it showed me that I loved research even more than I loved teaching. Up to that point, I thought I would be a teacher all my life. You know, I was good at it, loved it, and wanted to teach language. That's what I wanted to do. After that, I thought to myself, *Oh my goodness, there is something even more fascinating than teaching and that's doing research.*

At that point, I was in a committed relationship and I felt like my original plan of getting a degree and going back to Bulgaria to teach was changing. Robin and I decided to get married and then I applied to doctoral programs. One of the doctoral programs that admitted me was UW-Madison. Another one where I really wanted to go was the University of Toronto, where they have the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, a very well known institute for research. And I had loved the research on multilingual students coming out of there, but I was on the waiting list and didn't make it. So I moved here, to UW-Madison, where I also had a teaching assistantship. I continued teaching writing to undergraduates. The English Department here was very happy to have me as a TA because they rarely have students who have experience teaching writing. Then I did my doctoral work for five years and had my son in the meantime. I graduated in 2010.



Dani's kids watching the eclipse

In Madison, I realized that even though I had spent two years in Urbana learning how to teach English, none of the discussions I had heard there were about teaching as a political action, a colonial action in particular. There was no discussion of power, of what it means to teach a dominant language in a country that behaves in many ways like a monolingual country. When I came to Madison, there were a lot of leading senior scholars who were very political. I had



Dani's late husband Robin with daughter

classes with leading scholars in critical race theory and in newer versions of Marxist theory.

I couldn't believe that I had studied how to teach language for two years and never had conversations about how the teaching of anything, and language in particular, is extremely political: how we choose to teach it, the messages we convey about the language, how we address variations like dialects, accents, etc. I just couldn't believe it. I've always appreciated my education at UW-Madison because of that, because I learned about power. I did my dissertation here and through my dissertation, I got connected with an organization that serves multilingual students. It's called WIDA. It is part of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research and is housed at the UW-Madison School of Education. WIDA produces standards and assessments for multilingual students in over 40 states. I was a graduate student for them and I did my doctoral work on a professional development that they provided, because I discovered that I was most interested in adult learning. I wanted to study how adults learn and especially how teachers learn to change their practice and serve multilingual kids better. I wanted to understand the role of language in learning and that was what my doctoral work was about. It was working with teachers, exploring a professional learning opportunity that was provided by WIDA.

After I graduated, WIDA hired me right away, which was fantastic. I had a young child and did not want to move. Madison, especially for a middle class white family, is a wonderful place to grow up, to raise kids. Indeed, there is a lot of inequity in our city and we're trying to make it a better place for other folks as well but we have a long way to go. I wanted to stay, and I started working for WIDA as a staff researcher, a qualitative researcher, because I had used only qualitative methods for my work. I worked there for 11 years and I really, really enjoyed it.

I loved working as a researcher. To scratch the itch of teaching and to contribute to my local community, I also taught at a local college. I taught courses for practicing teachers in linguistics and language development. And I worked as a supervisor of practicum students, which meant that I visited my students in their classrooms. I would go and observe teachers teach in schools, and then give them feedback. And then as part of my work for WIDA, I facilitated a lot of professional learning. I designed professional learning and I co-facilitated with teachers at the school. I conducted a research study at one school for two years to see how adults change their practice, how they change the way

they think about what multilingual kids can do, and how they change their practice to integrate language instruction with subject area instruction. If you're teaching math, for example, how do you teach math and develop students' language at the same time, how do you teach it in a way that offers opportunities for students who may not be fully proficient in English to participate and show how much they know, things like that.

I had to learn a lot. I learned a lot about teaching math. I learned a lot about teaching science, the standards for science. As a language educator, I think language is a tool. Language proficiency for me has never been a goal in and of itself. We're not teaching kids to be proficient just to be proficient. We want them to be proficient so they can achieve their own goals. We work in service of their goals, in service of their learning across the content areas. When you're in this service position, I think we need to do a lot of learning about what is important in social studies, in language arts, in science. The next generation science standards came out while I was still engaged in this work. So I learned a lot about those and the kind of shifts in teaching practice that they wanted. As language educators, we do need to do our best to constantly learn about what it means to learn in a discipline, what the people who are focused on the discipline really care about, and what the kinds of learning that they see as really effective learning are, so we can then support kids in engaging in that kind of learning. I loved it.

“We're not teaching kids to be proficient just to be proficient. We want them to be proficient so they can achieve their own goals.”

Then two years ago, I moved because the culture of the organization changed and I didn't have the freedom that I wanted and needed. There wasn't as much room for innovation and creativity. I started looking for a new job just when the person who is now my supervisor, a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Rich Halverson, had just gotten a very large grant from the Wallace Foundation and was looking for a research director for that grant. So the timing was just perfect. He had never been my professor but we knew of one another, so he approached me and said, ‘Hey, I'm looking for a researcher; do you know of someone who may be willing to change what they're doing, spread their wings a little bit?’ I transitioned and became the research director for this \$8 million grant. For education, that's a big chunk of money, a six-year grant.

Now, we're in our third year and I have absolutely loved it. It's been such an opportunity for growth for me because I've had to learn how to relate to others and form relationships with people in very different roles: funders, other research partners, people on our research team, and graduate students. It's been a huge learning opportunity in maintaining relationships and bringing about and sustaining

partnerships. I feel that from an HR perspective, I have grown so much. The people I work most closely with, like Rich Halverson, my supervisor and the project manager for our grant, are fantastic and we get along wonderfully. So it's a joy.

One of the best things about this opportunity was that I just moved four floors. I'm still at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. I'm still doing research. I just moved down to a different office in the same building. We did not have to move houses or anything like that which is great because my son was very much opposed to moving. My daughter thought we could move as long as the cat moved with us, but not my teenage son.

So that was what you've been up to since graduating ACS in 1997. And then this summer you contacted us at the American College looking for ways to contribute to the ACS Scholarship Fund.

Yes, I've always felt that my time at the College was transformative. At ACS, I learned that my opinion was important and I could think critically and ask questions; that I as an individual have thoughts and ideas that matter. And that I'm allowed to – and not just allowed – encouraged to ask questions. I feel like there hasn't been anything more transformative than that: feeling seen as an individual, as a very young scholar, and encouraged to ask questions. And so I've always wanted to give back as a way to acknowledge the transformative power of education at this particular institution and pass it forward. It's something that I have always, always wanted to do.

I myself have benefited from scholarships a lot. While at ACS, I spent my junior year in California through financial support from the Soros Foundation. After my Master's, I wouldn't have been able to come to the US without the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign funding me and giving me a job as a teaching assistant. These experiences showed me that there is power in individuals supporting other individuals, that certain opportunities change lives, and that changing even one life is a good cause.

So, my plan was to contribute financially to ACS as soon as I paid off the mortgage on my home. At that point I wanted to dedicate the money that would not be going to the mortgage anymore to a scholarship. It happened that in the summer of 2023 I was in a position to do that because I guess there is some opportunity that comes with every tragedy. The way our society works is that sometimes you are rewarded monetarily for a loss. As a result, several years after my husband's passing, I was able to pay off the mortgage on our house and had this money that I had been putting towards the house. I decided – and in the circumstances, I was the only adult making the decisions – it was the right time to start a scholarship.

I realize that ACS is not the same. It was so small after the reopening, and it was very different. The leadership has changed, the social context has changed, and the economic context has changed since we were there. But I've always felt, and from what my parents who still live in Sofia have told me, that it still is one of the places where kids can have a good education, something that is not always true for all other schools.

What impact do you envision your scholarship will have on the student recipient? A transformative experience like the one you once had perhaps?

My hope is that the scholarship would be a launching pad for the student recipient, like in some ways it was a launching pad for me. I hope that whatever his goals are, this experience brings him closer to achieving them. And even if he is not aware of his goals yet, I hope that he has a high quality education. As a parent, I think that's what we want for our kids: a high quality education that they can do with whatever they wish with going forward. Whether his experience is transformative or not – you know, maybe he'll have a transformative experience after he graduates – I hope he receives a high quality education and I hope it is a good experience.

I was just thinking of our goals or my goals back when we were students here. I think I was just hoping to make friends and not miss my family too much, so not very ambitious goals, yet, in a way, very ambitious goals.

Yes, exactly. Make friends, feel accepted, feel recognized and seen, right? Learn something, be challenged intellectually. I think that's what we want for our kids now. So that's what I want for him. I want that to be within reach for his family.

You touched upon the values of an ACS education and also values that are taught here at ACS like critical thinking. What else do you hope students learn nowadays, here and everywhere really?

I hope that they learn how to be critical thinkers, but most of all, I hope that they learn that service is an important responsibility for everyone. They can interpret service any way they want. I don't think I learned this in school. I learned it later. But I hope that along with critical thinking, there is a service element that the College can teach its students as well. Because in many ways, I think it is a privileged environment to be in. And with privilege comes a responsibility to have an awareness of that privilege and not take it for granted. It doesn't mean that they have to give back, I don't think that. I think each of us should interpret service any way we want. But I think if we're encouraged to think about *How we can serve our community, how we can serve our families*, this will help us grow and find meaning in what we do.

I remember going to one school in Mladost and trying to tutor back when we were students at ACS.



ACS 8th graders visit 39th School, 2024

This is still a thing. In ESL classes, 8th graders do a series of visits to neighboring schools, most recently 39th School, and teach them English through various projects – it used to be creating illustrated fairy tales together, lately it has been board games – and then the kids from the other schools visit our campus.

I'm glad to hear that. To me tutoring was an important experience. And I'm glad that the College is still prioritizing this type of outreach. I now know that on the back end, there's a lot of effort, organizing and setting up. There needs to be a commitment to this sort of relationship from the leadership of the College. Along with critical thinking and being exposed to the idea that service is important, I also hope that the College gives everyone a fascination with learning and how much there is to learn, that learning is exciting.

Did it occur to you as a student that you may one day be in position to support the school and its mission financially or in any way?

Not as a student, maybe as a college student, I thought that if I get a degree in teaching English, maybe I'll go back and teach at ACS.

That would be amazing. Or you could do professional development with faculty. What are some vivid memories you keep of your time at ACS?

I think the memory that is one of the most vivid memories involved Miss Davis, our biology teacher. Do you remember Miss Davis?

Of course, I absolutely loved her.

So she did labs with us in biology, remember? I remember the lab with the different kinds of beaks. She put toothpicks in the grass and some of us had spoons, others sticky tape and we had to pick them up to understand the evolution of the beaks. But the whole idea that you can do a hands-on lab! We'd never done this in our elementary education, nobody did labs. I thought to myself, *Oh my goodness, is that what education can look like?*

I also remember Miss Moran, even though she was with us for one year only, because of her very high expectations. I will never forget how strict she was, this tiny woman, but I just appreciated how she really wanted us to think.

And I also remember us going to an Outward Bound experience in Rila – to Malyovitsa. It was so much fun doing all these rock climbing exercises and the

ropes and the zip line. And I remember that there was Nirvana being blasted all the time. Yes, these sort of out of school activities, I remember them being fun, lots of fun.

And what advice would you give other alumni considering giving back?

It is more of a reflection than a piece of advice. But I do think that a group effort, say the Class of 1997 all contributing to something, can make contributions feel more impactful. If I can contribute say \$300 a month, it may feel like nothing. I think that if we were encouraged to join such an effort and we knew each month what it was and what it was going to be used for, I think that would help. So going forward, it would appeal to me to know that I was part of a class initiative.

“At ACS, I learned that my opinion was important and I could think critically and ask questions; that I as an individual have thoughts and ideas that matter.”



Outward Bound near Malyovitsa, 1994



Green School in 1993 - Dani is center left

It would be great to see a variety of projects that need funding, if there is something specific that would appeal to people: for example, if there is a project with an environmental focus, which I really care about, or a journalism focus, where maybe we have peers with careers who would feel like contributing.

I would love to contribute to community service or social justice oriented projects. I would really love to see the collaboration with School #39 in Mladost continue and expand to other schools nearby.

I like how GoFundMe campaigns always include a goal, too. Rather than just asking for contributions, state why these people need \$7,500 and track

“I now know that there is power in individuals supporting other individuals, that certain opportunities change lives, and that changing even one life is a good cause.”

the progress towards that goal. Making it more concrete so that each of our contributions feels more impactful, I am hoping, will motivate our peers to contribute.

What makes you happy? What inspires you?

My kids make me happy and they inspire me. They inspire me because they challenge me. You probably feel this too, but becoming a parent, your actions have such an immediate impact and that is both good and bad. Sometimes I can barely hold it together and at the same time, I’m deeply aware I’m impacting these innocent souls. They are just so funny, so themselves, so unique. It’s inspiring to constantly be learning about who they are. I am savoring the spirit of their lives today, while they’re still living with me, before they go on to college. And I feel like even if I don’t remember it, there’ll be something new tomorrow, maybe later today.

My job also makes me happy. The kids are definitely first but my job is very important. I feel so privileged to have a job that brings me joy.

What are you passionate about?

I care a lot about social justice. In the United States, I’ve learned a lot about violence and oppression. Before coming here, I think I was only vaguely aware of the concept of social justice. Of course there is a lot of injustice in Bulgaria. It just looks a little different. But I feel that here in the United States, I’ve learned the vocabulary. I’ve learned more about what that is. And I see my work as contributing to social justice, if indirectly. It is focused on equity, and that inspires me a lot. Before my work was focused on serving multilingual students, students from immigrant families. Part of what really motivates me and inspires me, a lot of what I think about is, *What can we do to address injustice and work towards social justice.* I am grateful for learning about what that is and how it manifests itself in our society, in our



Dani and her kids, 2023



education systems, and in our working environment. Sometimes it makes me despondent, hopeless. And then I have to bring myself back. It’s the same with climate. I try not to be hopeless that the world is burning, you know. And so I try to think about how I can make a small difference with my individual actions on an everyday basis.

Which is the most interesting place you’ve been to?

The most interesting place I’ve been to is Australia, where my sister lives. I’ve been to Australia a couple of times already, and it is remarkable. The birds are different there, the trees are different, everything’s different.

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

If I could change one thing, I want each child to see themselves reflected in what they’re learning. I want them to see themselves. I want them to see themselves as a scientist, to see themselves as a writer, as a mathematician. That’s what I want.



The cast of Grease at ACS in 1997 - Dani in the middle



STOYAN TRENCHEV '16

The Humanitarian Who Became an Engineer

As an ACS student, Grade 8 through 12, Stoyan played the guitar and performed at classical and holiday concerts, even joining the school's rock band on electric guitar. A skilled debater, he won the Social Sciences Department award his senior year. When he returned for the 2023 alumni reunion, he shared his surprising new career path – working with wind turbines. Intrigued, we arranged a virtual coffee to learn more about this unexpected shift. Stoyan graciously agreed, thanks in part to some persuasion from his younger sister, as we later discovered. Special shout out to the younger siblings that can and teach us, if only we let them!

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

In honor of our interview, we're experiencing Danish summer weather here in Sofia today, July 3 with a cool 18 degrees Celsius.

Here in Copenhagen, it has been like this for... a long time.

How's life in Denmark otherwise? How's the wind there?

The wind is good, it's not moving too much. It's steady, which is very good for wind turbines. Life in Denmark can be stressful at times, but it's nice. There is a lot of work and running around but it's rewarding and fulfilling – definitely not boring.

Tell us what you've been up to since graduating in 2016.

Oh, that was a long time ago. 8 years but feels like 18, with everything that's happened. I went to Germany, worked a lot, graduated, and then worked even more.

What did you study in Germany?

I studied Renewable Energy Engineering, which is essentially electrical engineering for renewable systems, at the University of Stuttgart. My plan was to continue my education after my Bachelor's degree, but it didn't work out because the company I wrote my thesis with offered me a job on an awesome project – an offer I couldn't refuse. We were given the opportunity to redesign two wind turbines, making all the changes we wanted to meet our scientific needs. It was very challenging. Many of the things we aimed to do aren't typically done in the wind industry because they're too expensive. But we wanted to experiment with unconventional ideas. It was a lot of fun. We prototyped a lot on these machines and built some sensors that we designed ourselves. It was like Legoland for engineers, tinkering with these giants. I did this for about three years. So, to put it simply, I studied wind turbines.



So, would you advise younger students to take a gap year or a break between their Bachelor's and Master's degrees to see if what they're pursuing really is their passion?

It really depends on what you do. I have friends who took gap years and they went to Australia, traveling through the desert to find themselves. I couldn't do that. I think if you're pursuing something you love professionally, then sure, take a gap year. Otherwise don't. Time is precious.

And how did you choose the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) for your Master's degree?

For wind energy enthusiasts, Denmark is the place to be because the biggest and oldest wind energy

companies are based here. DTU has pioneered a lot of the work that goes into not only wind energy, but the entire concept of renewable energy. They conduct excellent research on basically every aspect that goes into implementing these ideas in reality. So, I applied there and was surprised to get accepted. Then came the complicated part of having to switch countries again and adjusting to everything. But it's been well worth it.

“I love that after assembling a wind turbine, you can go on top of it and have lunch. It's just awesome.”

So you recently had to switch back from working and learning on the job to going back to university. Has it been difficult?

Yeah, it's actually pretty hard. I had forgotten how slow-paced university can be. I came from crazy working hours and a lot of pressure, constantly aware that if something breaks, then something explodes. I was expecting the same pace here, but university is actually quite boring sometimes, and the workload is pretty manageable. For the first six months, I had too much time on my hands, so I started working again, not just to earn money, but also to keep busy. Now it's a lot more fun. There is a bit of the old pressure of having multiple deadlines to meet, so I wake up early in the morning.

What do you like most about working with wind energy?

I love that after assembling a wind turbine, you can go on top of it and have lunch. It's just awesome. You are sitting up there, looking down, thinking, “This was a hard day, but this is a nice view and I'm very happy I did this.” And it's not an entirely selfish job, either. You can earn money in many different ways, but with wind power and renewables in general, I feel that my career isn't just for me. I'm doing something for the greater good. When work gets tough, this keeps me going. Every wind turbine put into operation makes the world a little better and that's not a bad way to feel about your job. This was important when I was choosing my career path. With this mindset, overcoming hardships becomes a bit easier.

What challenges does working with wind energy pose?

There are many problems we still need to solve and a lot of controversy around wind turbines. I've heard claims from them killing mice to disturbing sleep to causing cancer. These controversies arise because many people don't really understand what's in them. In reality, a wind turbine is just a big fan. There is no technology in it that can harm bystanders. It has a generator and a gearbox, similar to what you have in your car, hair dryer, or laptop. In fact, your cell phone and other everyday devices generally have more emissions and are arguably more harmful, because they're so much closer to you when in use. A wind turbine is just glass fiber and metal that spins. But they're very big, and people see them. If we could see on a daily basis the emissions from a coal plant 200 kilometers away, we would be having a different discussion.



One argument against wind turbines that I agree with: they can be ugly. If you put a lot of them in one place, at night you see a sea of red lights. If I am on a hike and sleep in a tent, I wouldn't want to see that. It is a bit dystopian in my opinion. But there is a solution. The German government passed a law a few years ago requiring all red lights on turbines become infrared lights so they are invisible to the human eye. The red lights are there for planes to be able to navigate. Planes will have infrared cameras installed that see the infrared light, and this problem is solved.

Then you're left with debunking myths like wind turbines causing cancer, which I still don't know the origins of. Researchers haven't found a link between the two yet. The reason why we built our wind turbines with all the special measuring devices in them, was to research such concerns. We measured vibrations emitted into the soil, noise emission, bat activity to name some. We even caught wild birds and put sensors on them to track their movement and understand how they behaved and if they were actually killed by the turbines. So, now there's more data to inform these debates.

We also tried to assess the psychological impact of wind turbines on nearby residents. A few psychologists went from house to house, asking if the wind turbines were disturbing. They identified individuals that were

disturbed by the turbines and started monitoring various things in their houses such as the noise levels that actually reach the house and to what extent the person was affected by the turbine, etc.

It quickly became clear that the perception of wind turbines is quite subjective. We struggled to reach solid conclusions because everyone's experience was different. One highlight was this case of a senior citizen who claimed that the wind turbine disturbed his sleep. He was asked to record every time he woke up and if it was due to a wind turbine. It turned out the wind turbine had nothing to do with him waking up. He was waking up every time the train passed, not even next to his house, it was several kilometers away... But he couldn't see the train; only the red aviation light.

Do you know the status of wind energy here in Bulgaria?

Yeah, it's difficult and way behind schedule, I think. There are some projects which are working close to the Black Sea, but progress is slow. One major wind project, Dobrotich Wind, hasn't been built yet due to significant opposition from the local population. So, it's yet to be seen. Currently, Bulgaria is lagging behind the rest of the EU, including Greece and Romania, in terms of wind energy share. However, we're doing pretty well with solar, despite government inaction and grid problems. It's amazing how the free market pushes through these challenges. People, even with inefficient bureaucracy and bad infrastructure, keep pushing hard. So, I am optimistic. I think in a few years, we'll see some significant wind projects developed.

How has the wind energy industry evolved over the four years that you've been involved?

Almost everything is moving offshore now. Building wind turbines on land is tough because you have to deal with too many interests. There are always individuals, like the one I mentioned, who refuse to sign papers because they think wind turbines disrupt their sleep. So, there have been enormous incentives to develop technology that allows the installation offshore where



Owls are used for catching red kites, an endangered species that some people claim wind turbines kill

there are fewer parties involved. The wind conditions offshore are also much better, with less turbulence and more stable power production. You can also build much bigger turbines. Though they are more expensive to build, the projects are ultimately more profitable. Most of the capital is now focused on building offshore parks. This is great because European waters – the Mediterranean, the North Sea – have several hundred gigawatts of potential – enough to power Europe many times over. However, we are now also starting to see opposition similar to that on land. The new claim is that wind turbines kill fish, but research shows that building offshore wind farms actually helps fish by adding artificial underwater structures for them to nest in, much like artificial reefs.

Were you interested in engineering when you were at ACS? What was your area of academic interest? I recall you receiving the Social Sciences Departmental award in 2016.

I was not particularly interested in engineering while at ACS. My natural inclination wasn't towards mathematics or physics. I was actually preparing to become a lawyer. But in the end, it's technology that improves the world fastest, and I wanted to be part of that. Turns out you can learn mathematics and physics, even if you can't do it in kindergarten. There is this old joke: "Name one book that made you cry," and engineers pull out their math books. That was me.

Studying these technical things was difficult in the beginning. It felt like memorizing a phonebook. But once you make yourself sit down and do the homework, even though it's hard, with enough time and pressure, you can achieve your goals. Then, once you understand what the numbers mean, they become quite useful, and you can do a lot with them. Looking back, I'm pretty glad I made that decision.



*Stoyan at the ACS Christmas Concert, 2013 -
Photo by Konstantin Karchev '14*

Do you sometimes think about education and ways to make it better? What are your thoughts on the future of education?

One relatively recent feature in education, including at ACS, is formative assessment. In my opinion, it makes people a bit lazy and doesn't teach you anything. The real takeaway from school is learning how to deal with stress and uncertainty, like during exams. I don't remember my chemistry textbooks anymore but I do remember how to study for a chemistry exam. And that's an important skill.

What is your most marked characteristic?

I'm very impatient. I just can't sit in one place. I want things to happen very quickly, which causes a lot of problems, especially in engineering. It has caused me a lot of pain. Doing things too quickly and breaking things in the long run, doesn't build stable systems. So my lack of patience is not very helpful in building reliable things. And I've learned to deal with this, to just circumvent it somehow. But it has its uses in other places.

“In the end, it's technology that improves the world fastest, and I wanted to be part of that.”

What's your greatest fear?

I obviously don't want anything bad to happen to my family. Other than that, I don't really fear anything, actually. What's there to fear? We live in the best time in human history. I can sit in the middle of Copenhagen talking to you over my laptop as if we are out for a coffee right now.

Well, there are some things happening that kind of worry me lately, like the far-right parties winning all over the place. I am trying to convince myself that it's just a pendulum swing that will eventually come back to its senses.

I think people need a correction sometimes. When you start taking things for granted, you're bound to lose them. That's not necessarily bad. Perhaps we need to see how bad it can get before we start thinking critically. This will be a very healthy experience for many of us that don't read history books on a daily basis, I guess. But you're right, it is concerning.

What bothers me even more about the latest elections in Bulgaria was the fact how few people voted. Are you kidding me? Do people know how much suffering went into securing the right to vote? It's a powerful right and an incredible duty that everybody has to respect. Seeing people be careless about it drives me nuts sometimes. Vote for whoever you want, but vote. As the saying goes, The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

After the elections here, where by the way 70% of the Danes voted, I asked one of my Danish colleagues, a pretty wise guy, how they achieved this. He said, "Well, we have had democracy for 175 years now." He remembers being taken to the polls as a three-year-old by his parents. So, it's about setting the example early on. In Bulgaria, I guess it will just take time.

Exactly. And it's true that sometimes I've had to vote with disgust for the lesser evil, but that's part of it, right?

Yeah, it is. You take it in the chin but do your duty. It's a moral obligation. I don't know. It is complicated. That's why I became an engineer. (laughs)

What's your greatest accomplishment so far?

I don't really have one. My objectives are way up there, and it's still a long way to go. I consider my achievements thus far as mere steps along the learning curve, not the pinnacle. I've learned a lot, seen a lot, and gained a better understanding of how things work.



There has been pain and suffering and many expensive lessons learned, but I'm a bit wiser now, and that's good enough for me.

You said you read a lot of history books. Do you have a favorite historical person, fictional character or author?

I have several authors that I really like. David McCullough is one. I really like his books and the language he uses. He's a very passionate writer. You read one of his books, and you feel motivated by history. It's awesome! Not depressing as history books can sometimes be. I also like Paul Johnson a lot, he's another good historian.

“We live in the best time in human history. I can sit in the middle of Copenhagen talking to you over my laptop as if we are out for a coffee right now.”

Do you have words or phrases you overuse?

As we deal with code and machines daily, we engineers use the f-word a lot, so it is a bit of a battle for me to stop using it when something bad happens

Which talent or new skill would you most like to have? Earlier you said math was not one of your skills in high school, but then you went and added math to your skillset. What is next?

I want to understand plasma physics now.

I thought you were going to say Danish there.

No, I decided not to learn Danish. I was just about to start lessons when I did a risk-reward assessment. It turned out the risk of not learning Danish very well is very high. To be fluent in Danish, you have to speak it daily for about five years, and I don't have that kind of time. Plus, all Danes speak English. In fact, the language I want to learn next is Greek. A lot of people in my family speak it, and we have many friends there, so it will be a better return on the time investment.

Going back to plasma physics, there is a lot of talk about nuclear fusion right now. It is awesome and I love it. I think it's only a matter of time before somebody develops a working reactor. When that happens, I'll go work for them. It's a bit complicated, and I haven't gone into too much depth yet but it's such an interesting field. Understanding how it can be improved and what we can do with it is very exciting. If it goes online, it's climate dominance; we can do anything we want as a species on this planet, and that's a pretty cool thing. Unfortunately, I also think it might kill the wind energy business, but that's all right. The best idea survives and that's it.

Do you have a favorite place to be or a place you dream of visiting?

I don't really have a place I dream of going to. I like to be surprised: to just pinpoint a place on the map, go there, and discover things as I go. It's surprising how much you can find in a remote village in the middle of nowhere that's interesting and enriching.



I don't like going to places like Paris or Venice or other very popular tourist destinations. What's the fun in going to a place full of people that's super expensive and you already know what to expect? Where is the adventure in that?

I want to go to the International Space Station one day though. Experiencing life without gravity would be awesome.

TEODORA TODOROVA:

Teaching Demands Lifelong Learning; I Find This Inspiring

Teodora Todorova joined the American College of Sofia's Bulgarian Language and Literature department in 2009 as an intern fresh from her university studies. Her dedication to empowering students through language has been truly inspiring. From 2009 to now, when Dr. Todorova heads her department, it has been her belief that mastering a language grants us freedom, independence, and immunity from manipulation. It allows us to express abstract ideas, make jokes, convey much with a few words, and most importantly, articulate our dreams to give them a chance at becoming reality. Lucky are the ACS students who have had her teach and guide them in class or as part of The Fountain Literary Journal. It was an immense pleasure to discuss teaching, education, and life with a passionate educator like her.

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97



Where are you from, literally and metaphorically?

In reality, I was born in Sofia, and most importantly – in a wonderful family, an island where I felt happy as a child. Since it is still within reach, I am happy to be able to return there from time to time. Sometimes I imagine I'm from a fictional world created by a novelist who loves to interweave storylines, make unexpected twists, and have characters with colorful personalities meet.

How did you become a teacher? Can you tell us a bit about your background and what inspired you to become an educator?

Becoming a teacher and coming to ACS has been one of the most valuable adventures in my life. I've always liked the occupation of the teacher, perhaps because I had the good fortune to meet great teachers in my first years at school. Another important source of inspiration was my family, as both my parents are, university professors. When I was a child, their activities had some romantic aura for me: the desk lamp – on, late in the evening, my parents reading, writing, preparing notes and presentations. I was curious to hear their stories about their students, and we still love to talk about teaching experiences – sharing moments, anecdotes, and concerns, discussing different topics and talking about books.

Curiously, the first person to name me “the teacher” was my younger brother when he was about four and I was in elementary school. At that time, I constantly mentored and annoyed him by trying to teach him the things I was learning in class. It was a teasing of sorts and a prophecy. When I became a real teacher, he said to me, *You see, didn't I tell you?* He was the first one to see my fate. He keeps encouraging me and sympathizing with me in my adventures as a teacher.

“My days at work are never monotonous. There is always something surprising, intriguing, and challenging. Teaching demands that you keep learning, and I find this inspiring.”

How did you come to ACS?

I came to ACS somewhat unexpectedly. It was one of those twists of fate. I was studying Cultural Studies at the university, a very inspiring time for me as I met outstanding university professors and made valuable connections with my fellow students. At the same time, my interest in literature and language continued to grow, and at a certain point, I decided to start a second degree in Slavic Philology where I specialized as a teacher in Bulgarian Language and Literature. When I finished my studies, I felt that I would like to continue with my path in Cultural Studies and applied for a second Master's degree in Cultural Anthropology. I successfully passed



Teodora with her first class, that of 2011

the admission exam and interview but... missed the deadline to enroll. Due to the university's strict enrollment procedures, I had to wait for a year to be able to apply again. At first, of course, I wasn't very happy, but then I said to myself, *Maybe this happened for a reason.* Some months later, I had the opportunity to apply for the position of intern at ACS. I couldn't have done that, had I taken the university path. Cultural Studies as a field and a way of thinking about the world continue to influence my path as a literature and language teacher, and I don't feel it was a loss that I didn't pursue that degree.

More significant than the story of how I came to ACS though, is why I stayed. I am deeply thankful to many of my colleagues, some of whom played a decisive role in my professional development, and to my students, who are my number one reason. I am especially grateful to my first class of students, an 11th grade profile group from the Class of 2011, who ignited my passion for teaching. They were a wonderful group of young people. It was a pleasure to share my first days as a teacher, with all their “ups and downs,” with them.

What do you like most about teaching?

The unexpectedness, perhaps. My days at work are never monotonous. There is always something surprising, intriguing, and challenging. Teaching demands that you keep learning, and I find this inspiring. It's not just about your subject field. As the world is changing, methodologies also change. Trying new approaches and teaching techniques is exciting, albeit challenging. Then sometimes... they fail to give the expected results. You learn a lot about people, too. Communicating with so many different personalities – students, teachers, parents, develops you as a person... Here at ACS, I have met inspiring students and colleagues, and I am grateful for these encounters.

What are the challenges you face in teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature (in an American College)?

I will answer with an anecdote. In a student survey

focusing on student experience in class, ACS students have to indicate in what language the subject, BLL, is taught. As this is an American survey, Bulgarian is not listed as an option, so students need to select "Other." But students usually ask me whether "Foreign language" is the right answer. "Only if your Bulgarian is "foreign" to you," I say jokingly. Of course, Bulgarian is never going to be foreign to them. One cannot escape their own culture. Our mother tongue constructs our way of perceiving the world, and this is something our students know.

Our students are immersed in an English-speaking environment, it is part of why they chose ACS. I see this as a good opportunity for students to achieve a deeper understanding of their cultural identity. There are some specific moments when this identity becomes more important for them – for example the holidays that are connected to Bulgarian culture and national identity. Sometimes students come to me and my fellow BLL teachers looking for support or planning an initiative to do something "Bulgarian." They usually begin saying: "Why don't we..." I enjoy



The editorial team of *The Fountain*, with former ACS teacher Roumy Rangelova (front row, first from right)

this Bulgarian *Why don't we...* so much.

Other times, for example in relation to university applications and pragmatic student needs and objectives, our subject is not a priority and is sometimes marginalized. At the same time, the expectations on the Matura exam remain high, so there is always tension...

As BLL teachers, we have a responsibility to uphold the idea that no matter where you are in the world your language and culture are an integral part of your identity. Being literate in your mother tongue is what sets you apart. Bulgarian, a "small" language, doesn't have the great impact of English spoken all over the world, but to be the bearer of a small language is a privilege as it will always set you apart amidst global uniformity. The achievements of Bulgarian literature and culture are in this sense even more precious.

That's why my wonderful fellow BLL teachers and I seek ways to promote Bulgarian culture and literature and emphasize the significance of mastering your own language in and outside of regular classes. For example, through the student literary journal *The Fountain / Беседа*. This year, we held an initiative for May 24th, the Day of Slavonic Alphabet, Bulgarian Enlightenment, and Culture. Our international colleagues, always very supportive, joined our

literary readings within this initiative by performing a favorite work written by a Bulgarian author.

What was your favorite subject as a student?

My answer will surprise you... Of course, I loved literature, but not always, especially not in the years when I had to prepare for university admission exams. My favorite subjects were philosophy and math, especially in 12th Grade when we studied stereometry.

Did you have a favorite teacher?

I was fortunate to meet many inspiring teachers, which is one of the reasons I chose this profession. There were several teachers in the First English Language School where I studied who left an indelible mark on my path. My teacher in math, who had a real talent to explain complex things in a simple way and a great sense of humor; my teacher in philosophy who like a modern-day Socrates asked us provoking questions and didn't give us a single ready answer until we had worked through it ourselves; and my teacher in literature who treated us as independent learners and with respect. At the beginning of 11th Grade, she inspired me to read a book by prominent Bulgarian literary critic Nikola Georgiev, which helped me gain a deeper understanding of literary analysis for the first time. Curiously, I had the chance to meet this inspiring professor in the university auditorium several years later. I will always remember my literature teacher saying: "Teodora, you will become at least a teacher in literature." How I like this "at least" now. All these inspiring teachers only had some chalk and a blackboard at their disposal in the classroom, but what made them special were their personalities.

"All these inspiring teachers only had some chalk and a blackboard at their disposal in the classroom, but what made them special were their personalities"

What is your teaching superpower?

If I were asked this question at the start of my teaching career, I would, with utter self-confidence, list several teaching superpowers. But now, from the perspective of a wiser person, I am still an apprentice in mastering my superpowers. What helps me the most in my teaching profession is my curiosity and my eagerness to learn.

What is your idea of a perfect class?

A class where all students love learning just for the sake of learning.

What is your greatest fear?

The school bell rings for the beginning of the class. I enter the classroom, and... there is no one there.

What do you value most in your students?

I like their honesty, when they show respect to people around them, and their curiosity for the world.

How do you hope to impact your students during their time at ACS and beyond?

I hope to strengthen students' love for reading and encourage them to keep questioning the world around them.

How do you stay connected with former students and alumni?

Apart from giving an interview for the Alumni Magazine (*laughs*), what makes me the happiest teacher in the world is when a former student writes to me or comes to visit.

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

I think that today's children spend too much time in school and very little time with their parents and family. If I could, I would change the economic system so that parents do not have to work eight hours or more a day, thereby having more time to spend with their children, communicating and learning from them. This way, schools will become friendlier for everybody.

is a place where these conversations should happen – motivating students to be open to change and adaptive to changing realities, while remaining critical, and thinking about these transformations and their deep cultural dimensions.

If we look backwards, education constantly evolves with the changing sociocultural and economic processes, while keeping its core – giving individuals the opportunity to discover and develop their human potential and preparing them to be part of society. At some point (this is a pessimistic scenario), if the atomization processes begin to prevail, education will be challenged. The school should retain the “socio-” part.

“If I could, I would change the economic system so that parents do not have to work eight hours or more a day, thereby having more time to spend with their children, communicating and learning from them.”

What is one of your most memorable moments at ACS?

I have quite a few stories to tell. I offer two among those bright moments.

One of my very first days as an intern at the College, I spent following my inspiring mentor in the teaching profession – Roumy Rangelova, the former Bulgarian Language and Literature Department chair. I remember very clearly how exhausted I felt just observing her workday from the side – she had classes, several meetings, conversations with students, departmental work, and tasks for the student literary journal *The Fountain*. At what I thought was the very end of the school day, she said: “Come, let's go to the green field.” I thought, at last, the time had come to rest. But no. It turned



*Teodora at Faculty Follies, 2013
Photo by Konstantin Karchev '14*

What change do you wish for ACS?

ACS is a school that is constantly evolving, adapting to the fast-changing world and working to prepare its students for the future. At ACS, both students and teachers can truly grow. I wish for ACS not to change but “persist” by upholding the idea in its core – to remain a place where learning is a value in itself, and a place for dialogue between cultures. There are many external processes that may threaten this idea, which is why it's even more important that the school “persists.”

How have you seen education evolve over the years, and what changes do you find most significant?

What a complex and philosophical question. What is eminent for now is the rapid technological change that leads to swift implementation of diverse technologies within the classroom. The speed of these technological advancements often outpaces our ability, as humans, to fully comprehend the multifaceted implications – encompassing cultural, ethical, psychological, and other dimensions. One example is AI, which is already present in the classroom. Students and teachers can use it as a tool, but we also need to achieve a better understanding of the challenges and the deep transformation that it brings. Students need to be involved in this reflection and global debate. School



Teodora and colleague Todor Valev '06 at Faculty Follies, 2013 – Photo by Konstantin Karchev '14

out that she was also the advisor of the Golf Club. I had no idea such an abundance of things could fit in an ordinary school day of a literature teacher. We sat on the bench at the side of the field and I felt like an athlete before a very important game seated by his coach. We had a long conversation about the teaching profession. At the end, she told me: "You know, being a teacher is very challenging, but it's interesting." This moment is a precious memory etched in my heart. The story might have undergone some transformation in my mind with time, but when I ask myself why I am doing this it often emerges.

Another memorable moment happened about 10 years ago, and to this day, it makes me smile. At the end of one of my classes, I told my students: "For our next class, please, prepare to analyze *Stone*." I meant that we were going to read Atanas Dalchev's poem *Stone* and that my students needed to read and bring the text. At that *Stone* Age time, we didn't use Google Classroom as intensively and the students mainly worked with texts on paper in class. When the time had come for our next class, my students came prepared. They brought actual stones. That made us all laugh, and my comment that they had properly literalized the metonymy made the situation even funnier. That was one of those moments when I felt that special relationship with students that goes beyond the classroom – they felt safe to joke with me, and at the same time we had a wonderful class as of course they had also read the poem and came prepared. I still keep these stones in a cardboard box with other precious treasures from my students.

“What helps me the most in my teaching profession is my curiosity and my eagerness to learn.”

What do you consider your greatest accomplishment?

Well, this is not an easy question to answer, as it implies self-praise to some extent. I feel grateful for many things in my personal life that I don't consider accomplishments but gifts of good fortune. In my professional life, I feel it is an accomplishment to have been a teacher for 15 years and still keep my passion for teaching. I am also happy that I could intertwine the two main paths in my professional development – my interest in Cultural Studies and my role as a Bulgarian Language and Literature teacher.

Just two weeks ago, I successfully defended my PhD thesis in which I explored educational practices that emerged with the development of the Internet. By analyzing the case of Bulgarian educational sites and platforms, I tried to observe how the practices of creation, dissemination, and use of educational materials online change the situation of the classroom and the traditional pillars of institutional education – the teacher as an authority and the



Teodora and her family at Art Fest 2023



At The Fountain awarding ceremony, 2019

textbook as a systematized source of knowledge. It gave me the opportunity to reflect on the situation of the school institution in the present context of the dismantling of hierarchies, rethinking of the notions of expertise and authority, technologization of the modern world, and tensions between education understood as a public good and education perceived as a commodity. I hope that what I have acquired through this particular academic adventure will serve as a good basis for my teaching practices.

Do you have any hidden talents or hobbies that might surprise us?

Not many people know that I used to play the trumpet. Unfortunately, I abandoned this hobby several years ago. Lately, my own children have started requesting that I take the trumpet out of its slightly dusty case and play something. So I imagine that at some point I'll have no choice but turn back to the trumpet to the collective rejoice of our neighbors.

Which talent would you most like to have?

I want to have the talent to write fascinating fictional stories.

What kind of music do you enjoy, and do you have a favorite artist or band?

Music is one of the best ways for me to harmonize myself. So in different moments, I turn to different types of music. When I need energy, I listen to rock and metal music in its different genres – symphonic, gothic, progressive, or ethno-. When I need creative inspiration, I like to listen to new-age. In moments when I feel in an intellectual mood, I turn to jazz. And when I need to experience the achievements of human civilization, I listen to classical music, which I enjoy most when performed on piano by my daughter Yoana.

How do you like to relax and unwind after a long day?

I unwind by playing with my two daughters – aged 3 and 10. One of our favorite “extremely relaxing” exercises is dancing to *Believer* by Imagine Dragons, one of my kids' favorites. I escape the dynamics of the teaching workdays by traveling with my family. There is nothing like the feeling of relief the moment my husband manages to close the car boot, loaded

with more than everything you need for a family of four, as we set out on a trip.

Who is your favorite fictional character?

As a literature teacher, I have been fascinated by many fictional characters, either because of the skillful way authors employ specific literary strategies and devices to construct their image or the ideas they embody. As a reader, unencumbered by my professional pursuits, I enjoy characters because of their personalities. Especially those who need to do something unexpected, learn from their journey, and turn back to things that are indeed important to them. It is very hard for me to choose one.

As a mother of two children, one of which read all the Harry Potter books by the age of 8, without any hesitation, my favorite character is Hermione Granger. More specifically, when the heroine in J.K.Rowling's novel receives a time-turner from Professor McGonagall allowing her to be in two places at the same time (this way she could, for example, attend two courses at once). Sometimes I just need such a time-turner.

What is your favorite travel destination, and why?

Worlds revealed in books, as they give you experiences that can hardly be obtained for just one human life.

What are you currently reading?

I am reading two books in parallel – thanks to my time-turner, of course (laughs) – both written by Irish women writers. The first one, *Beautiful World, Where Are You*, a novel by Sally Rooney, translated to Bulgarian by Boryana Dzhanchabetska, experiments with the interweaving of third-person and epistolary narrative. The two main characters – Alice, a well-known novelist, and Aileen, an editor in a literary magazine, exchange emails as they reflect on their contemporary world in an attempt to find some intransigent meaning and beauty in it. Their lives are dynamic, complex, and sometimes messy, but through their correspondence, they don't feel lonely. You know that wonderful, bittersweet moment when you're nearing the end of a book you've been deeply immersed in? It's a mix of excitement as you eagerly await the book's conclusion and reluctance as you don't want the journey to come to an end. I am right there.

I have just started *A Ghost in the Throat*, a book, which I was very eager to read as it is in the beautiful translation of a friend from the English language school – Maria Zmiicharova. It is the first prose work of Doireann Ni Grioffa, an experiment with genres as it inhabits the space between nonfiction and fiction. The narrator tries to reconstruct the life of an eighteenth-century poetess, Eibhlín Dubh, through a poem written by her. Recounting this woman's life, who lived two centuries before, Doireann tries to arrange it into a narrative of her own. Judging from this literary journey's beginning the adventure will be exciting indeed.

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

At ACS, the unwavering support from our community is vital to maintaining and elevating the standards and values we hold dear. Your generosity makes a profound impact, opening doors for deserving students, enriching their educational experiences, and ensuring the excellence of our faculty and facilities. By contributing today, you help shape a brighter future for every ACS student. **Join us in making a lasting difference.**

The **need-based financial aid** program at ACS is a crucial part of the school's identity, ensuring that deserving students have the chance to attend the College and be part of a community that cares deeply about their academic and personal growth. Your support towards this program can open doors for students who might not otherwise have the means to access the high-quality education ACS offers.

Beyond the classroom, ACS provides a wealth of exciting student projects, activities, and international exchanges that enrich the learning experience. From the Robotics Club to the Filmmaking Club, these opportunities are not always inexpensive. Your support towards **student activities** and competitions can help make these valuable learning experiences a reality for the next generation of ACSers.

Attracting and retaining the best teachers is a priority for ACS. If you have fond memories of the exceptional educators who have shaped your life, consider supporting ACS' **excellence in teaching**. Your contribution can help the school continue to provide students with the guidance and mentorship that has been a hallmark of the ACS experience.

The ACS campus is a beautiful and state-of-the-art learning environment, but it requires constant care and improvement to maintain its high standards. The time has come to renovate and enhance facilities like Sanders Hall and Djerassi Hall. Your support for **campus improvements** will ensure that the school's infrastructure continues to support the academic and personal growth of its students, without placing an undue burden on tuition fees.

Choose the cause that resonates most with you, whether it's need-based financial aid, student activities, teaching excellence, or campus improvements. Donations of all amounts are welcome and will make a meaningful difference in the lives of the next generation of ACSers. They will thank you by making the most of their ACS experience, sharing their awesomeness with the world, and serving their communities, the way they've been shown at the College.

For further inquiries on how to support or get involved contact us at advancement@acsbg.org.





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